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(1970-2014)**

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**RE-MODELLING CLAY: CERAMIC PRACTICE AND THE MUSEUM IN
BRITAIN
(1970-2014)**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements of the University of Westminster
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

This thesis analyses how the dialogue between ceramic practice and museum practice has contributed to the discourse on ceramics. Taking Mieke Bal's theory of exposition as a starting point, it explores how 'gestures of showing' have been used to frame art-oriented ceramic practice. Examining the gaps between the statements these gestures have made about and through ceramics, and the objects they seek to expose, it challenges the idea that ceramics as a category of artistic practice has 'expanded.' Instead, it forwards the idea that ceramics is an integrative practice, through which practitioners produce works that can be read within a range of artistic (and non-artistic) frameworks.

Focusing on activity in British museums between 1970 and 2014, it takes a thematic and broadly chronological approach, interrogating the interrelationship of ceramic practice, museum practice and political and critical shifts at different points in time. Revealing an ambiguity at the core of the category 'ceramics,' it outlines numerous instances in which 'gestures of showing' have brought the logic of this categorisation into question, only to be returned to the discourse on 'ceramics' as a distinct category through acts of institutional recuperation. Suggesting that ceramics practitioners who wish to move beyond this category need to make their vitae as dialogic as their works, it indicates that many of those trying to raise the profile of 'ceramics' have also been complicit in separating it from broader artistic practice. Acknowledging that those working within institutions that sustain this distinction are likely to re-make, rather than reconsider ceramics, it leaves the ball in their court.

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Author's declaration

I declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work.

Laura Breen

September 2015.

Introduction

Ceramics is an art whose practitioners have become peculiarly suited to silence. Their silence about their work and that of their peers has become a symbol for their seriousness as artists, in a way that is radically different from other arts. The truly authentic and serious potter is the one who unknowingly makes pots, whose artistic journey is unmapped, whose silence allows a critical space to open up into which the critic, the curator and collector can step, who allows what could be described as an interpretative vacuum.

A silence or vacuum allows for aestheticizing encounters...¹

Speaking at the *Ceramic Millennium* conference in 1999, potter, writer and academic Edmund de Waal used celebrated studio potters Bernard Leach and Michael Cardew as exemplars of this mode of practice. He proclaimed that even when they wrote about their work, they did so in ways that stressed that unselfconscious production was more authentic than self-conscious individualism and thinking. He suggested that, for them, and many of those they influenced, silence was a marker of the qualities that the industrialised West had lost. However, he cautioned that this stance inhibited understandings of their work.

Counselling ceramists to talk about their work, De Waal's speech bore a striking similarity to the conceptual artist Daniel Buren's 'The Function of the Museum' (1970) in which, almost thirty years before, he had declared:

Whether the place in which the work is shown imprints and marks this work, whatever it may be, or whether the work itself is directly – consciously or not – produced for the museum, any work presented in that framework, if it does not explicitly examine the influence of the framework upon itself, falls into the illusion of self-sufficiency or

¹ Edmund De Waal, "Not in Ideas, but in Things" in: Clark, G., ed. *Ceramic Millennium. Critical Writings on Ceramic History, Theory and Art*, ed. G. Clark. (Halifax, Nova Scotia: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1999) 350-361. Republished as "Speak for Yourself," *Ceramic Review*, no. 182 (2000) and in *Interpreting Ceramics*, 2004, accessed 24 October, 2011, <http://interpretingceramics.com/issue005/speakforyourself.htm>.

idealism. This idealism (which could be compared to Art for Art's sake) shelters and prevents any kind of break.²

Furthermore, like Buren, de Waal sought to address the impact of those frameworks by placing them at the heart of his work, creating site-sensitive interventions in museums and heritage sites. He did so, not, as Buren did, to challenge the institutions' authority to interpret and their capacity to reinforce the hegemonic narratives of art history – in many ways, ceramic practitioners and the institutions that supported them had propagated the narratives his work challenged – but, instead, to explore the discursive power of recontextualisation and the “language of objects.”³

Since De Waal delivered his paper, a number of other ceramists, including De Waal's University of Westminster colleagues Clare Twomey and Christie Brown, have become engaged in projects that engage the “museum as medium,” and which exploit the narrative potential of ceramic objects and practices.⁴ However, moving beyond object-making and into interdisciplinary territory, they have also brought the categorisation of their work into question. Why should it be regarded as ceramics?

Whilst these projects were explicitly discursive, Mieke Bal has proposed that all ‘gestures of showing’ are constitutive of discourse.⁵ Focusing on museums as interdisciplinary spaces where different aspects of the integrative practice of ceramics co-exist, I, therefore, extrapolate from De Waal's discussion about the silence of ceramists to pose my first research question: How has the dialogue between art-oriented ceramic practice and museum practice shaped the discourse around ceramics? Analysing ‘gestures of showing’ that include

2 Daniel Buren, “The Function of the Museum,” in *Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artists' Writings*, eds. A. Alberro and B. Stimson (Cambridge, Mass. And London, England: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2009), 105.

3 Edmund de Waal, “Not in Ideas, but in Things,” 104-5.

4 This term was taken from James Putnam's highly influential survey of the relationship between artistic practice and museum practice. James Putnam, *Art and Artifact: The Museum as Medium* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2001).

5 Mieke Bal, *Double Exposures: The Subject of Cultural Analysis* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), 2.

contemporary ceramic practice, I also ask how exposition can highlight the convergence of and gaps between such works and the various statements made about ceramics. Finally, I consider the repercussions that my findings may have for those who use 'ceramics' as a means of distinction. I aim to make an original contribution to knowledge by offering new understandings of how ceramics has been framed as an art form. In addition to this I will offer insights into the constitutive dialogue between ceramic practice and museum practice, challenging the idea that an interpretative vacuum has surrounded ceramics. Primarily, I hope this research will contribute to the literature on ceramic practice, where treatment of the subject has largely focused on individual works, rather than critical context. However, it may also serve as a catalyst for further museological research into the collection and display of ceramics – a subject that has received scant attention within that field to date.

1. Background

In 2009, when I started work in the decorative arts department of The Potteries Museum and Art Gallery in Stoke-on-Trent, I sought to orient myself by reviewing the museum's acquisition and disposals policy: a document that sets out the priorities of each department. What were the decorative arts? In other institutions ceramic objects dominated that category, but not in Stoke, where there was a separate ceramics department. And where did the work of contemporary artists such as Grayson Perry, who won fine art's celebrated Turner Prize in 2003 and who used pottery as a vehicle through which to communicate ideas, sit? The policy did little to answer my questions. In the section headed "ceramics," which referred to the ceramics department, I read a statement that suggested Perry might fall under its authority:

The nationally significant Contemporary Art Society Special Collection has developed since 1999 through lottery funding from Arts Council England. It focuses on groundbreaking artists whose work challenges traditional divisions between art and craft with relevance to existing

collection strengths. It includes examples by Grayson Perry, Gavin Turk and Jacqui Poncelet.⁶

However, moving on to the arts section, in an indication that such work *did* ‘challenge divisions,’ I found the same paragraph under the heading “contemporary art and craft.” As for the decorative arts, that section included textiles, dolls, glass, metalware, furniture, jewellery and a collection of jade and ivory. Furthermore, the acquisition policy for the arts (the department within which I worked) placed a stress on interdisciplinarity and thematic approaches to curation; perhaps a reflection on the indeterminate nature of contemporary artistic practice. In practice, this was fine, as we worked collaboratively. Nevertheless, in 2011, when the museum prepared to stage *Award* – part of the second British Ceramics Biennial – the term ‘ceramics,’ raised questions about departmental ownership. The exhibition contained a number of vessels, which would easily slot into the studio pottery displays in the ceramics galleries. It also included sculptures, such as Nao Matsunaga’s *Standing Stone or Lost* and scaled-down versions of larger works shown at other Biennial sites, such as Rosa Nguyen’s *Living Wall* and Phoebe Cummings’ *Fragment*: an encased section from a larger raw clay work. The art department was more accustomed to installing sculpture, installation and ephemeral works, which they moved far beyond the connoisseurial display techniques used in the ceramics galleries, yet the Biennial explicitly declared its allegiance in its title.

This experience led me to question the limitations of using the term ceramics as a fixed category. All of the work in the Biennial, from Lowri Davies’s handcrafted cups to Steelite International’s industrial tableware and *Plate Spinner* – a performance piece in which David Cushway spun plates on poles, leaving the audience to anticipate their demise – might be regarded as ceramics. Indeed, the Biennial embraced the pluralism of ceramic practice. However, it would be difficult to tack the material arrayed across the Biennial’s

⁶ Stoke-on-Trent Museums Service, *Acquisition and Disposal Policy 2005-8* (Stoke-on-Trent: Stoke-on-Trent Museums Service, 2008).

various sites onto the museum's ceramic displays, without bringing their logic into doubt.

In describing 'gestures of showing,' such as exhibitions, as discursive acts, which make views on a subject public, Bal proposes that:

Exposition is always also an argument. Therefore, in publicising these views the subject objectifies himself as much as the object: this makes the exposition an exposure of the self. Such exposure is an act of producing meaning, a performance.⁷

Different gestures can, thus, construct ceramics in different ways, according to the position of the people and/or the institutions that perform them. In the case of the Biennial, there were multiple gestures, made by representatives from the City Council, the Biennial organisers, museum staff and artists. However, the messages promoted through exposition are not homologous with the meanings that people make from them. As Jacques Rancière has advanced, spectators are not the passive recipients of messages sent by those who perform acts of exposition. Instead, they are active interpreters, who make their own meanings, which connect the gesture of showing they are presented with to those they have experienced elsewhere: the 'emancipated spectator' "makes his poem with the poem that is performed in front of him."⁸ Bal, similarly, has argued that acts of exposition can be regarded as a means of communication, based on shared codes and understandings, which allow others to participate in discourse formation.⁹ Regarded from this perspective, exercises such as the Biennial, which expose the pluralism of ceramic practice, can offer alternative takes on the term 'ceramics,' which can highlight the exclusions inherent in other models. In doing so, they raise questions about the motivations of those who use that label as a means of definition.

7 Mieke Bal, *Double Exposures: The Subject of Cultural Analysis* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), 2.

8 Jacques Rancière, "The Emancipated Spectator," *Artforum* (March, 2007): 277. See also Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (London: Verso, 2011).

9 Mieke Bal, *Double Exposures: The Subject of Cultural Analysis*, 3.

Those questions were at the forefront of my mind when I applied for the *Behind the Scenes at the Museum: Ceramics in the Expanded Field* studentship to which this PhD is attached. The project focused on ‘ceramic artists,’ taking the distinction of that category as a given and declaring it would examine whether the exhibitions and installations these artists produced ‘have altered the ways in which curators have approached their collections.’¹⁰ However, it did not address the dialogic relationship between curatorial and ceramic practice or the role that those responsible for the acts of perception, which they sought to shift, might play.¹¹ Nevertheless, it aimed, amongst other things, ‘to contextualise and define the powerful relationship between ceramic practice and museology within the broader international arena of visual culture.’¹² It, therefore, offered an opportunity to interrogate the relationship between ceramic practice and museum practice, exploring the space between the statements made about ceramics – whether in the museum or elsewhere – and the objects those statements pertained to, as well as the views they exposed.

2. Theoretical framework

No one starts to form or to display a collection without inheriting past process, and each collection or display in place contributes its mite to the dynamics of change.¹³

10 The project brief declared: “It is envisaged that this doctoral thesis produces a contextual study of how different practitioners – both ceramicists and fine artists - have used the museum as an exploratory arena for altering the perception of ceramics and challenging museological conventions. It will be a theoretical and contextual study asking questions as to whether these exhibitions and installations have altered the ways in which curators have approached their collections and if there are common methodological assumptions behind these ceramics interventions in museum collections?” University of Westminster, *Notes for Guidance Regarding the Project Studentship: Behind the Scenes at the Museum* (London: University of Westminster, 2011). n.p.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 Susan M. Pearce, “Collecting Reconsidered,” in *Interpreting Objects and Collections*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 203.

Susan Pearce's analysis of collecting and curatorial process might equally be applied to doctoral research, through which one sifts and sorts material, constructing versions of the past that shape the present. However, this PhD is embedded in an Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funded project that (re) constitutes its domain of study on a grander scale. Supporting three collaborative projects: Twomey's *Plymouth Porcelain: A New Collection* (2012), which was produced with Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery; Brown's *DreamWork* (2012) with the Freud Museum; and Julian Stair's *The Matter of Life and Death* with York St Mary's (2013); three associated symposia; five research seminars and a three-day international conference, the *Behind the Scenes at the Museum: Ceramics in the Expanded Field* project might be seen to thematise the relationship between contemporary ceramic practice and the museum.

In the 1960s and '70s, theorists such as Michel Foucault challenged the notion that there was one, objective, history. For example, in *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, he exposed the omissions that are inherent in metanarrative-based history, highlighting the partiality of such approaches and gesturing to the numerous alternative histories that might be written.¹⁴ In the wake of these shifts, as David Green and Peter Seddon have discussed, it became apparent that any attempt to describe the past necessarily bears the mark of the author's position.¹⁵ I was, therefore, compelled to question my place within the project, the role that my research might play in articulating or perpetuating particular narratives about ceramic practice and its relationship to the academic and funding bodies that supported it, as well as my personal concerns.

Proposing that all critical analysis should be performed with attention to one's "situatedness in the present," Bal's model of cultural analysis is explicitly

14 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Tavistock/Routledge, 1989). Original work published 1966, trans. 1970.

15 David Green and Peter Seddon, "Introduction: Art, Historiographical Practice and the Ends of History," in *History Painting Re-assessed: The Representation of History in Contemporary Art*, ed. D. Green (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 1-17.

tailored to such conundrums.¹⁶ By proceeding from this standpoint, we can understand the past, not, as L.P. Hartley famously described it, as “a foreign country,” where things were done differently, but as part of the present.¹⁷ This permits us to explore its specificity without attempting to reconstruct a mythical wholeness or denying our own subjectivities.

So, how exactly am I situated? I have a BA in History of Art and Design and an MA in Art Gallery and Museum Studies, yet ceramic practice was rarely addressed on either course. Moreover, both schooled me to constantly question the value judgments that are inherent in the selection (or non-selection) of objects for collection and display, as well as their subsequent categorisation and interpretation. I also worked in the museum sector, largely within collections departments, from 2003 until 2011, when I commenced my research. It was, therefore, through museum practice that I became interested in ceramic practice. Yet, I am working within the Ceramics Research Centre: UK, the identity of which (and funding for) centres on medium-based practice. I am engaged on a project that centres on the impact of shifts in ceramic practice, which was originally conceived by De Waal, Twomey and Brown, whose practices it concerns. I am also doing so at a time when the return to ceramic media and process within fine art, the Crafts Council’s move toward supporting craft practice, rather than ‘the crafts’ as a set of disciplines, and the associated critical move towards discussing craft as a verb, as exemplified in the writing of Glenn Adamson, have challenged the notion that ceramics is a discrete area of practice. Within this climate, when BA and MA ceramics courses, including those of the department in which I am based, have been closed, to perform acts of reframing that further challenge the distinction of ceramic practice might appear nihilistic.¹⁸

16 Mieke Bal, “Introduction,” in *The Practice of Cultural Analysis. Exposing Interdisciplinary Interpretation*, ed. Mieke Bal (California: Stanford University Press, 1999), 1.

17 Leslie Poles Hartley, *The Go-Between* (1953; reprint, United Kingdom: Penguin, 2015) n.p.

18 Glenn Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft* (London & New York: Berg & V&A Museum, 2007); Glenn Adamson, *The Invention of Craft* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2013).

3. Definitions

This situation left me with an issue: I was keenly aware of Julia Bryan-Wilson's essay "A Curriculum of Institutional Critique, or the Professionalization of Conceptual Art," in which she cautioned that those writing on critical artistic practice can reduce a broad range of discursive practices into a single genre, peppered with key works and moments.¹⁹ Any attempt to plot the historical relationship between ceramic practice and the museum might, similarly, subsume the specificities of each case study. If I tried to establish a lineage for recent works, my text might form the foundations of a medium-specific curriculum of intervention that would lend itself to the addition of the qualifier 'ceramic.' As detailed in discussions of 'ceramic sculpture' elsewhere in this thesis, in the past, this adjunct has served as a defence against critical comparison or absorption.

So what is ceramics? There are publications, courses, societies, entire museums and departments within them – what Pierre Bourdieu labelled 'agencies of consecration' – devoted to the subject, but what do they consecrate?²⁰ Can ceramics be regarded as a field? A field, as delineated by Bourdieu, is a space structured by different forces, within which actors and agents can take up a range of positions. It is constantly re-made as agents and institutions struggle to maintain or topple the current dispersal of capital and it also possesses a degree of autonomy, sustaining itself in the face of challenges from other fields.²¹ For a large part of the twentieth century, studio pottery – a term used to describe limited production by individuals or small groups of

19 Julia Bryan-Wilson, "A Curriculum of Institutional Critique, or the Professionalization of Conceptual Art," in *New Institutionalism -Verksted #1*, ed. Jonas Ekeberg (Oslo: Office for Contemporary Art Norway, 2002), 90-109.

20 Pierre Bourdieu, "The Market of Symbolic Goods," in *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 1.

21 Pierre Bourdieu and Lois Wacquant, "Pierre Bourdieu," in *Key Contemporary Thinkers*, ed. R. Stones (London and New York: Macmillan, 2006) 268-9.

makers – and the individualistic practices that emerged in its wake, might be seen to fit these criteria. As this thesis details, the discourse around ceramics has privileged and, therefore, legitimated such forms of practice, which have been its predominant focus, whilst excluding others. New practices have also continuously displaced them. However, the autonomy of ceramics and its distinction from other fields, particularly those of fine art and the crafts, is less clear.²² Moreover, this would-be field of creative practice represents just a fraction of the content of many museums' ceramics collections and an even smaller proportion of their ceramic holdings.

As sociologist Alan Warde has elucidated, fields, as delineated by Bourdieu, also offer little room for, amongst other things, non-competitive and emotionally rewarding participation. This issue prompted Warde to reconsider the relationship between practice and field in Bourdieu's work, drawing on Theodore Schatzki's discussion of dispersed and integrative practices to formulate a solution. For Schatzki, a dispersed practice demands an understanding of how to perform it, the ability to recognise when another is doing so and the awareness of how to elicit it when required. When combined with an adherence to overarching rules and an understanding of how various performances of a practice might be evaluated, they can become integrative practices, which can constitute specific domains of social life.²³ Describing their operation, Warde proposed:

Practices are developed over time by groups of practitioners who are engaged in that practice. In general, as an integrated practice begins to diffuse, institutions emerge to make it more widely known, to teach novices, to improve performance, to promote and legitimate it and its virtues. In modern society this institutionalization is very pronounced and occurs through formal vehicles like practitioner organizations and

22 The identity of craft as a field, group of disciplines (the crafts) or a process and practice is also ambiguous. Here, however, I am describing efforts to establish a distinct field for "the crafts," as a set of disciplines in post-war Britain.

23 Theodore Schatzki, *Social Practices: A Wittgensteinian Approach to Human Activity and the Social* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 91-109.

training schools, but also through informal means like listening to mass media and conversations.²⁴

In his discussion of practice in *Distinction*, Bourdieu indicated that there may be some overlap between field and practice, but did not expand upon this notion. However, integrative practices can also stand outside of the logic of fields and this model can, therefore, be use to address the institutionalisation of particular forms of ceramic practice without demanding their collective autonomy. It offers a route through which to discuss the discourse around ceramics, the hegemony of particular ideologies and modes of practice and the overlap with integrative practices, for example, art, craft and design, at particular moments, without generalising. It can also accommodate the different permutations of ceramics that are shown within museums and galleries, accounting for the role that such institutions can play in consecrating particular forms of ceramic practice as art.

Instead of accepting the autonomy of the category of ceramics, I therefore, approached it – and categories such as craft and art – as domains that are constantly made and re-made. By attending to the role that museums – also conceived as individual entities with shifting priorities, which are informed by individual, collective and institutional concerns – have played within this re-making and how the statements they have made about ‘ceramics’ related to their own identities, I was able to acknowledge my own imbrication in this process. The project thus served as a position from which to “understand the past as *part of* the present.”²⁵

24 Alan Warde, “Practice and Field: Revising Bourdieusian Concepts,” CRIC discussion paper 65 (Manchester: University of Manchester, 2004): 18; Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique on the Judgment of Taste* (London: Routledge, 1984), 208. This serves to extend Bourdieu’s discussion of practice in *Distinction*, where he groups certain practices according to affinities, for example; “sporting practices,” intimating that they can have a recognisable collective identity too. However, whilst Bourdieu suggested that fields and practices might be closely linked, he did not elaborate on how.

25 Mieke Bal, “Introduction,” in *The Practice of Cultural Analysis. Exposing Interdisciplinary Interpretation*, 1.

4. Research strategy

Whilst the relationship between ceramic practice and museum practice has been addressed in a number of articles, exhibition catalogue essays and books published since the late 1990s, they were written by a limited pool of people – often those, such as De Waal, who addressed the matter through their work, whether ceramists or curators. Although, my searches quickly highlighted these articles and they, in turn, referred to exhibitions and other texts, it was apparent that many did so in a way that might be regarded as canon building: identifying a ceramics-specific lineage for recent practices that might otherwise be read within other frameworks such as that of installation art. I, therefore, conducted a literature search that centred on ceramics, to obtain a thorough understanding of the ways in which different authors had framed ceramic practice, noting any references to museums or expository practice. Although alert to the impact of global developments, I focused my research on practices in Britain. I did so in order to examine the specific cultural circumstances within which they took place and the impact that shifts in funding, education and government policy had on those practices.

The late 1800s, when the Arts and Crafts movement began to frame craft practice as a morally superior counterpoint to the homogenisation of industry, formed the starting point for my initial research. This Arts and Crafts ideology has informed much contemporary ceramic practice, whether as an influence or point of difference. However, I also conducted research into studio pottery practice, noting that two precepts of this approach – limited production and hand-making – were at the core of the ceramic practices that organisations such as the Craftsmen Potters' Association (CPA) and Crafts Advisory Committee (A.K.A. the CAC and later becoming the Crafts Council) began to institutionalise in the late 1960s and 1970s. I observed that, with the founding of these organisations, acts of showing were increasingly used to promote particular narratives about ceramic practice, with the responses to these efforts

often highlighting points of contention at the time. Interrogating broader histories of the artist-museum relationship, it was also apparent that ceramic practice was becoming institutionalised just as other artists, such as Buren, had begun to challenge the ways in which the histories told in museums, galleries and other institutions conformed to and reproduced dominant ideologies. Often employing gestures of showing to do so, they questioned – amongst other things – the hierarchical distinction between different media and the tenets of medium specificity.

This research helped me to define the limits of my thesis. I identified various points where acts of exposition had facilitated efforts to reframe ceramic practice in the twentieth century. However, it became apparent that in the early 1970s the move away from medium-specificity and the metanarratives of art history in fine art practice coincided with the development of the ‘agencies of consecration,’ individuals and organisations that set the parameters for ceramic practice by validating particular forms and excluding others.²⁶ Museums in Britain also began to establish collections of contemporary ceramics in the same period, bringing recent and historic practices into conjunction on a more regular basis. This led me to centre my research on the discourse that surrounded these ‘agencies of consecration’ and its convergence with or divergence from other narratives about ceramic practice, as well as the role that gestures of showing within museums (being long-established agencies of consecration for art, the category to which many works in this era aspired) played within this.

The initial brief for the *Behind the Scenes at the Museum: Ceramics in the Expanded Field* project stated that the PhD researcher would undertake in-depth interviews with living ‘ceramic artists,’ which would “include the question of whether this involvement altered their practice and if it is possible to see a new

26 Pierre Bourdieu, “The Market of Symbolic Goods,” in *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 1.

kind of practice emerging from the challenges of working in museums.”²⁷ However, as De Waal and crafts historian Tanya Harrod – amongst others – have observed, the discourse around ceramics has long centred on the artist’s practice and intentions.²⁸ Accordingly, alternative readings, which highlight the discursive potential of ceramic works and the limitations of categorisations such as ceramics or the crafts, have been masked. In the same vein, to focus on ‘ceramic artists’ would take that category as a given, whilst looking for ‘a new kind of practice’ would privilege novelty over the intertextual and interdisciplinary. In fact, I took museums as the focus of this study precisely because the constitutive dialogue between production and consumption within them creates a gap between such authorial and authoritarian statements and the meanings drawn from them.

In addition to this issue, the networks through which research about ceramics is disseminated are close-knit and intensely hierarchical. Those at the top of that pyramid are the keynote speakers at conferences including the one attached to the *Ceramics in the Expanded Field* project; they run university departments and review publications and also produce exhibitions and texts that create sympathetic frames their own work or those who fit with their ideologies. The discourse around ceramics might, thus, be regarded as something of a closed loop, which protects the institutions founded upon its distinctiveness. As design historian and Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) research fellow Linda Sandino has observed, when people are invited to tell their stories, they articulate what philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1992) labelled, their ‘narrative identity.’²⁹ It might, therefore, be argued that according those at the top of existing hierarchies opportunities to re-write their own histories with hindsight would only naturalise their dominance.

27 University of Westminster, *Notes for Guidance Regarding the Project Studentship: Behind the Scenes at the Museum*.

28 Edmund De Waal, *20th Century Ceramics* (London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 2003), 173-4. De Waal; Tanya Harrod, “Crafts,” *Journal of Design History* 7, no 4 (1994): 299-300.

29 Linda Sandino, “For the Record: [Un]official Voices at the V&A,” *Journal of Conservation and Museum Studies* 10, no.1 (2012): 1.

Responding to this tendency towards insularity, I decided to focus on archival sources, rather than gathering oral histories: an approach that was later justified by my encounter with several of the dominant figures within ceramics and crafts, who, somewhat aggressively, countered my analyses of the impact of their work with statements of intent. Instead, I explored how narratives around acts of exposition were manifested in contemporary exhibition records, reviews and other literature. I then read these sources and the acts themselves in relation to contemporaneous literature about artistic practice, museum practice, funding policies and educational frameworks.

On occasion, where existing sources did not provide information about the composition of a work or the details of an exhibition, or where different sources offered contradictory information, I interviewed relevant parties to obtain further detail. The fact that the museum professionals I interviewed were curators, rather than staff from other departments was largely due to the nature of the archival material available and the gaps within it and in related documentation. However, I only conducted interviews when I had deficient information to allow me to make a reasoned analysis of a particular situation. I did not develop a structured programme of interviews from the outset, but, instead, identified interviewees who may have been able to offer clarification and balance on particular matters; both practitioners and museum professionals. Consequently, each interview was tailored to the interviewee and the specific area of research I was focusing on at the time. On occasion, these interviewees had moved away from ceramics and/or the public eye, reinforcing their exclusion from the discourse on ceramics, and I had to conduct a great deal of research to locate them, through various intermediaries. I conducted the majority of these interviews over the phone, although I visited the studios of Astbury and De Waal; the former in order to view historic works and archival sources in person and the latter as it allowed the artist to produce work for a project deadline as we spoke.

I was alert to the ways in which hindsight might lead interviewees to frame their answers in relation to existing practices or in response to their marginalisation within ceramic discourse. Drawing upon John W. Cresswell and Dana L. Miller's approach to oral history, I therefore undertook a process of triangulation: "a validity procedure where researchers search for more convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study."³⁰ This also allowed me to address examples or details that were poorly recorded – often as a consequence of their lack of conformity with existing categories or hegemonic ideologies – without giving primacy to their authors.

To this end, I analysed every issue of *Ceramic Review* – the mouthpiece of the CPA, which self-identified as 'the establishment,' in the early 1970s – and the CAC-owned *Crafts*, which quickly took over its mantle as the barometer of contemporary opinion.³¹ I examined physical copies of these magazines, as the letters pages, advertisements, exhibition listings and images within them were, largely, not reproduced in digital versions. Those pages, replete with small black and white images with one line captions, offered snapshots of works that received little attention in either published or museum histories of ceramics; perhaps because they did not fit within existing frameworks. They also chronicled disagreements between different parties who were engaged with ceramic practice and listed exhibitions with provocative titles, but little detail. Along with those indeterminate practices hidden in plain sight within features that centre on technique and process, or captured within exhibition reviews, these glimpses of dissent and diversification provide a more pluralistic view of ceramic practice than those garnered by attention to critical literature alone.

Using this research, I created a map of different instances where ceramic practice had intersected with museum practice and signposted artists and exhibitions whose works might warrant further investigation in addition to

³⁰ John W. Cresswell and Dana L. Miller, "Determining Validity in Qualitative Enquiry," *Theory into Practice* 39, no. 3 (2000): 126.

³¹ David Canter, "From the Secretary's Desk," *Ceramic Review* 1 (1970): 2.

those I had already identified. I located reviews and archival sources that related to them and also searched the archives of the V&A, The Shipley Art Gallery, The Potteries Museum and Art Gallery, the National Museum of Wales and Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art (MIMA),³² which had sustained relationships with contemporary ceramic practice. Through this process I, again, discovered works and gestures of showing that were not captured in my literature searches. I also searched arts publications for references to ceramics or clay, although the ceramic content of the work was often not foremost in the minds of the authors and therefore went unmentioned. Nevertheless, these works too were often captured on the pages of *Ceramic Review* and *Crafts*, or in conference proceedings or reviews, often becoming the focal point of disagreements about the standards or status of ceramic practice.

Through these processes, I identified numerous instances wherein the dialogue between ceramic practice and museum practice provided occasions for re-thinking dominant narratives about ceramics. Several broad areas of overlapping concern were apparent within this and they form the basis of my chapters.

5. Structure

This thesis does not aim to provide a comprehensive overview of the relationship between ceramic practice and museum practice, but, instead, focuses on specific examples where the two have intersected between 1970 and 2014 in Britain. It is divided into six chapters, each of which is subdivided into four or five thematic sections.

The first chapter interrogates the identity of ‘ceramics.’ Initially, I highlight the problems posed by any attempt to define it and illustrate how Bal’s approach to categorisation might provide a solution. Discussing recent

³² MIMA had also absorbed the collections of the Cleveland Craft Centre, although that organisation’s archive had not been filtered and was, therefore, unavailable when I was conducting my research.

works that explore the relationship between ceramic practice and the museum, I suggest that these acts have foregrounded the discursive potential of both ceramic objects and exposition, often highlighting the limitations of medium-based definition. However, I contend that gestures of showing have been central to efforts to shape the discourse around ceramic practice since the early twentieth century. Attention to the discursive function of these acts of showing challenges the long-held belief that ceramic practice has been, historically, silent. Outlining how these gestures helped to construct 'ceramics' as a specific object domain, I argue that that the process accelerated in the 1970s as part of wider efforts to argue for the distinctiveness of the crafts as a set of medium-specific disciplines, which included studio pottery. Noting that it did so at a time when the integrative practice of ceramics was beginning to overlap with that of art to a much greater degree, I forward the idea that the institutionalisation of ceramic practice masked its pluralism. However, this process of institutionalisation occurred at the same time that museums, which, as inherently interdisciplinary bodies, offered a broader and more fragmented view of ceramic practice, were beginning to engage with contemporary 'craft' on a more sustained basis. My analysis indicates that, by examining the relationship between gestures of showing in the museum and the dominant narratives about ceramics, we can identify points of slippage between object and discourse, which demonstrate the pluralism of ceramic practice and the inadequacy of attempts to harness it to a single category.

Of course, these acts are not performed in isolation and are informed by the social, political and cultural changes which foster (or restrict) particular practices. For this reason, the second chapter centres on the shifting institutional landscape in Britain. It is broadly chronological, so that the examples discussed in other chapters can be mapped against changes to education and arts policies and their effects on museum practice, ceramic practice and the funding mechanisms that have supported them. In it, I argue that the move away from vocational pottery courses towards the teaching of ceramic process within the

art departments of colleges and universities contributed to the growth of art-oriented ceramics. I also contend that artists, museums and educational establishments have been increasingly called upon to demonstrate their wider social impact in order to gain or sustain funding and that collaboration has proved a key means of doing so. I forward that, as a result of this, ceramic practitioners have had more opportunities to move beyond the discrete object and consider the discursive potential of ceramics. The consequences of working in this way are outlined in the successive chapters.

The remaining chapters are also thematic and each is broadly chronological, so that they too can be mapped against the institutional and ideological shifts that are chronicled in the first two chapters, whilst resisting the temptation to slot them into a single history.

In chapter three I attend to the relationship between ceramic practice and museum collections. In the first section, I examine changing attitudes to collecting the contemporary. I also outline how collections objects were initially regarded as a tool for artistic instruction, but have been re-framed as a means through which the artist can facilitate visitors' meaning-making processes, linking historical and contemporary concerns. Examining works that employ ceramic practice within interventions in museum collections displays, I posit that that the museum is not a target of critique for ceramic practitioners, but has served as a site of friction, where the discursive limits of the medium can be re-negotiated. I contend that this has often entailed a shift from medium-specific object making to multimedial production, which not only highlights the discursive potential of ceramic objects, but also challenges the logic of medium-based categorisation.

The shifting dynamic between contemporary ceramic practice and museum as space and place forms the focus of chapter four. In the first section, I explore how ceramic practitioners have attempted to shift the spectator's spatial relationship to their works in order to elevate their status, whether arguing for their acceptance as sculpture or positioning them as autonomous art objects.

Comparing them to their sculptural contemporaries, I observe that in proceeding from a medium-first standpoint, the works are often formally similar to their sculptural counterparts, but refer back to ceramic practice. Conversely, I explore instances in which historic houses have served as sites through which ceramic practitioners have been able to exploit the resonance of ceramic objects, weaving new narratives that re-animate the places they occupy and move their practice beyond self-referentiality. Proceeding from the ideas Miwon Kwon articulates in *One Place After Another*, I conclude with the suggestion that whilst site-specific works may be formally intermedial and comparable with works produced by other artists, the exhibition history of the artist often returns them to the discourse around ceramics. However, I contend that because recent gestures of showing within the museum often centre on the production of other discursive sites and privilege the reader over the author, they exceed the limits of ceramic discourse.

Taking Bal's notion of multimedialised discourse as a starting point, chapter five examines shifting attitudes towards ceramic media and process within the museum. Exploring recent initiatives to increase tactile access to museum objects, I interrogate the relationship between touch and content, raising questions about the benefits of gaining tactile access to art-oriented ceramic objects. Moving the focus to the issue of 'showing making,' I explore the tension between demonstration and 'thinking through making' in museum demonstrations and residencies. I suggests that museum programmes that favour facilitation, rather than ends-oriented artist engagement can provide opportunities to consider the value of materials-based investigation as what Tim Ingold calls an 'art of enquiry,' in its own right.³³ Observing that this aligns it with relational art practice, I examine how artists have employed ceramics within such frameworks, exploring, amongst other issues, the resonance that making has within discourse around immaterial labour. Finally, I address the

33 Tim Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture* (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2013), 6.

issue of ephemerality in ceramic practice: the symbolic capacity of unfired clay and broken ceramics and their heightened referential capacity within the museum context. In conclusion, I suggest that although these initiatives and artworks demonstrate the potential of process-based and relational understandings of ceramics, they operate at a remove from core museum displays. They, thus, bring the friction between contemporary practice and historic attitudes to collecting into question. I suggest that the rise in site-specific commissioning in the museum might be regarded as a symptom of this identity crisis.

The discursive role of the medium-specific temporary exhibition forms the focus of the final chapter. Initially examining exhibitions produced in the days when the CAC was still establishing itself, I highlight the ambiguous identity of ceramic practice in the 1970s. Drawing attention to how the CAC/Crafts Council's mission to support the innovative use of craft media conflicted with its need to distinguish itself from fine art, I suggest that exhibitions produced in this period gesture to the divergence of some aspects of ceramic practice from studio pottery practice. I follow these examples with an analysis of two later gestures of showing which respond to this fissure. The first of these – *Fast Forward* – made the case that decorative studio pottery was an art form in its own right, which was distinct from other forms of ceramic practice. The second – *The Raw and the Cooked* – offered mixed messages, by forwarding the proposal that clay was a viable material for sculpture and including works created by sculptors, but showing them alongside the type of ceramic vessel that had previously been distinguished from this category. In the third part of the chapter, I investigate how exhibitions have been used as a mode of history writing to celebrate the differences between various aspects of the integrative practice of ceramics and to create a medium-specific lineage for works that use fine art formats, but proceed from ceramic practice. In closing, I turn to the ways in which ceramic works have been employed in exhibitions that seek not to interpret, but to create discursive sites. I observe that this approach, like the

move towards discursive practice outlined in other chapters, has reframed 'ceramics' as a theme, rather than category of practice. I suggest that this approach has given the agencies of consecration that have institutionalised art-oriented ceramic practice a continued role in contemporary practice, but one that has a restricted purview.

6. Scope of the research

Whilst acknowledging that the integrative practice of ceramics has a broad base, my research centres on the art-oriented practices that have been institutionalised by bodies such as the Crafts Council since 1970, in publications such as *Ceramic Review* and through the critical literature on ceramic practice. This approach is grounded in the observation that the art aspirations of trained ceramists have proved the main point of friction within ceramic discourse. The relationship between their work and those produced through other forms of ceramic practice, whether studio pottery or fine artists' use of ceramic media, have, therefore formed the focus of innumerable acts of exposition within the museum.

Although commercial galleries have formed the main outlets for art-oriented ceramic practice, this research largely focuses on public museums and galleries. It does so in order to explore their function as sites that can consecrate art and ceramics, within which different aspects of the integrative practice of ceramics (both historical and contemporary) come into collision. In addition to this, it seeks to examine the repercussions that the emphasis on dialogue and interdisciplinarity within museum practice in the period under discussion has had for those producing art-oriented ceramic works, particularly those who have taken 'the museum as medium.'

With several thousand museums in Britain and an unfathomable number of artists using clay, my research has, necessarily, been confined to case studies that I could identify through my literature search and the archival research that

proceeded from it. It was also shaped by the availability of archival sources: many museums, for example, The Shipley Art Gallery, no longer have all of their exhibitions records and some, such as Sunderland Arts Centre, no longer exist, whilst others, such as the Potteries Museum and Art Gallery, the National Museum of Wales and the V&A hold extensive records. In addition to this, it largely centres on England and Wales, as these areas have formed the focus of both the critical literature on ceramics in Britain and efforts to reframe ceramic practice.

As the national museum with the greatest curatorial responsibility for ceramic practice and the one that provided the blueprint for its treatment within museums in Britain, the V&A has a prominent role within my discussions. However, each case study was chosen for its ability to provoke discussion about a particular facet of the artist-museum relationship, not the status of the institution that hosted it.

I am also keenly aware that this research accords the works of Edmund De Waal, who contributed to the bid for the *Ceramics in the Expanded Field* research project, and Clare Twomey and Christie Brown (co-investigators on that project) a great deal of attention. However, it does so because they have effectively constituted the ceramics-museum relationship as an area of study. Their practice, therefore, demanded interrogation. To downplay their contribution to this discussion would obscure their role in making it worthy of analysis.

Although addressing change across a forty-four year period and covering many facets of the relationship between ceramic practice and museum practice, this thesis does not claim to provide a survey of this terrain. Instead, it highlights points of intersection between ceramic practice and museum practice and attends to their discursive function. Reflecting the pluralism of ceramic practice, it does not fall neatly into themes. Rather, each of the chapters, and the sections within them, should be regarded as frames for discussion.

Chapter ONE: Contextual Review

...the number of sources and influences coming to bear on the perception of ceramic, both from the production and the consumption end, mean that it is a priori open to multifarious interpretation; it will never have singular or pure meanings. It will always have boundaries that leak, it will impinge on other spheres and will be impinged upon as a matter of course.³⁴

Outlining the issues that those attempting to construct a historiography of ceramics faced at the turn of the millennium, art historian Paul Greenhalgh's analysis bore the hallmarks of his former position as Head of Research at the V&A museum: an institution founded on the collection and systematic arrangement of material culture, which – like other Western museums – had become increasingly alert to the biographical and polysemantic potential of objects over the previous two decades. It also raised questions about organisations and institutions that use the term 'ceramics' to delineate an area of artistic practice, whether museums, bodies such as the Crafts Council or university departments. What interpretations have they imposed, what have they included and excluded and to what ends?

Such questions have been central to critical artistic practices that have been collectively discussed under the heading of 'institutional critique.' Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, who address the issue in much greater detail than is possible within the bounds of this thesis, have described it as a 'concern,' which has taken many different forms, rather than a genre or style.³⁵ Broadly, the term encompasses works produced since the late 1960s, which explored the ways in which museums and other institutions project an image of rational neutrality, which masks the ways in which they produce and

34 Paul Greenhalgh, "Social complexity and the historiography of ceramic" Fourth annual Dorothy Wilson Perkins lecture at The Schein Joseph International Museum of Ceramic Art, New York, October 14, 2001, accessed April 13, 2013,

http://ceramicsmuseum.alfred.edu/perkins_lect_series/greenhalgh/

35 Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, eds. *Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artist's Writings* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: MIT Press, 2009), n.p.

reproduce the hierarchical divisions within society – and sometimes, by extension, within and between art forms.³⁶ However, the rise of new approaches to museum practice, which became known as ‘The New Museology,’ entailed a shift in focus to ‘the purposes, not the methods of the museum.’³⁷ Consequently, museums became increasingly concerned with demonstrating institutional self-reflexivity, drawing attention to, rather than attempting to hide their discursive role. This led to an overlap between artistic and museological concerns and the 1990s and 2000s saw a surge in museum-commissioned artist interventions, with projects such as Richard Wentworth’s *Questions of Taste* at the British Museum (1997), *Give and Take/Mixed Messages* at the Serpentine Gallery and V&A (2001) and the *Museummaker* project (2005-11) as well as a number of retrospective publications.³⁸

It was this period that saw the growth of ‘gestures of showing,’ which included ceramic objects and which engaged the ‘museum as medium.’ Projects such as De Waal’s *Modern Home* (1999) at High Cross House, Dartington, Twomey’s (2006) at the V&A and Grayson Perry’s *Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman* (2011) at the British Museum thrust the relationship between ceramic practice and museum practice into the spotlight. These acts of exposition had divergent aims: De Waal hoped to challenge preconceptions about the place of ceramics within the home through installation; Twomey’s participatory work was in *Clay Rocks* – a late night event that used contemporary practice to engage new audiences and frame the museum’s collections in different ways and for *The Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman* Perry juxtaposed his own works with objects

36 Mel Ramsden, “On Practice,” in Alexander *Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artist’s Writings*, eds. Alberro and Blake Stimson, eds, 176. Ramsden’s “On Practice,” originally published in 1975, is believed to be the first text to use the term ‘institutional critique.’

37 Peter Vergo, *The New Museology* (London: Reaktion Books, 1989), 3.

38 For example, James Putnam, *Art and Artifact: The Museum as Medium*; Nina Montmann, ed. *Art and its Institutions* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2006); Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, eds. *Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artist’s Writings*.

in the British Museum's collection in order to question the value placed on the named author in contemporary society.³⁹

Until this point, the position of ceramics in relation to museum critique had received little critical attention. Eilean Hooper Greenhill explored how the same objects can elicit different readings when interpreted in different ways as part of her discussion of the *Palaces of Culture: The Great Museum Exhibition* (1987) at Stoke-on-Trent City Museum and Art Gallery, relating this to the limited focus of ceramics displays.⁴⁰ James Putnam's groundbreaking survey *Art and Artifact: The Museum as Medium* (2001) has Antony Gormley's *Field* (1991) - an installation comprised of hand-made clay figures - on its cover. Yet, for Putnam, as his title declared, the museum, in all its heterogeneity, was the medium. Bal has, similarly, suggested that as multimedial sites, museums "appeal to those interested in challenging the artificial boundaries between media-based disciplines."⁴¹ In exploiting the narrative potential of ceramic objects De Waal, Perry and Twomey might, therefore, be seen to challenge the logic of discussing their work as 'ceramics.' This issue returns us to the issue addressed at the head of this chapter: how has 'ceramics' been constructed in the first place? Can attending to this issue counter the notion that, as De Waal has forwarded, ceramics practitioners have been victims of acts of "cultural ventriloquism" performed by "the critic, the curator and collector."⁴² And can it expose the ways in which that apparent silence perpetuates the notion that the term 'ceramics' is objective and nonpartisan, allowing us to consider its ideological import?

39 Sōetsu Yanagi, *The Unknown Craftsman: A Japanese Insight into Beauty*, reprint, adapted by Bernard Leach (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1989), 197-215. The figure of the 'unknown craftsman' also occupies a key position within the discourse on ceramics. In 1972, Bernard Leach published an anthology of writing by Sōetsu Yanagi, who was the most prominent member of Japan's *mingei* or folk craft movement. In his 1927 essay 'The way of Craftsmanship,' Yanagi stressed folkcrafts were aesthetically and spiritually superior to "artist crafts" because they were free of egotism. He argued that consequently "The thing shines, not the maker."

40 Eilean Hooper Greenhill, *Museums and their Visitors* (London: Routledge, 1994), 118.

41 Mieke Bal, *Double Exposures: The Subject of Cultural Analysis*, 3.

42 Edmund de Waal, "Not in Ideas, But in Things," 350.

1. Towards a standard

‘Ceramics’ (when used to describe a domain of clay-based artistic practice) developed out of studio pottery. This, in turn, had emerged in the wake of the Arts and Crafts movement and internalised many of its values. To some extent, the Arts and Crafts movement also prepared the ground for future attempts to shape the discourse around ceramics and the shifts in practice that drove them. Written in the late 1800s William Morris’s texts such as *Art and Labour* and *The Revival of Handicraft* reconfigured hand-making as an ideological activity: a means by which to resist the homogenising forces of industry. This romanticised notion of craft has been consistently rearticulated in response to technological change ever since. On this occasion, it served, amongst other things, to sustain hand-made pottery when the production of affordable functional wares threatened to make it obsolete.⁴³ In 1887 an Arts and Crafts Exhibition society was launched, which might be read as a broader statement about the Arts and Crafts ideology. Founding president Walter Crane argued that it would:

...give opportunity to the designer and craftsman to exhibit their work to the public for its artistic interest and thus to assert the claims of decorative art and handicraft to attention equally with the painter of easel pictures, hitherto almost exclusively associated with the term art in the public mind.⁴⁴

This reflected his view that it might provide both an antidote to both the “poor taste,” of many of the industrial products shown in the exhibitions that grew up in the wake of the Great Exhibition of 1851 and, particularly, serve as a critique

43 William Morris, “The Revival of Handicraft,” in *The Craft Reader*, ed. G. Adamson (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2009), 146-55. Original work published 1888; William Morris, “Art and Labour,” in *The Unpublished Lectures of William Morris*, ed. E.G. Le Mire (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1969), 94-118. Original presented 1884.

44 Walter Crane, “Of the Arts and Crafts Movement: Its General Tendency and Possible Outcome,” in *Ideals in Art. Papers. Theoretical. Practical. Critical*. (London: George Bell and Sons, 1905), 22.

of the fine art emphasis of the Royal Academy.⁴⁵ However, although the movement placed an emphasis on utility, the time-intensive processes and materials they used raised the price of their products, including ceramic objects. For the average consumer, this shifted them into the category of the luxury, which Bourdieu has suggested is defined in opposition to necessity.⁴⁶ This discouraged regular use, which might risk damage. Only those of a high social status might regard them as commonplace and employ them as intended. This led to a conflict between rhetoric and audience that was to have continued impact on ceramic practice. Nevertheless, at this stage, there was no 'ceramics,' and studio pottery was simply regarded as one of many ways in which ceramic practice could be applied.

The Arts and Crafts movement prized qualities such as traces of the maker's touch, which Walter Benjamin would later discuss as part of a work's aura: the signs that authenticate its provenance and highlight its unique nature.⁴⁷ In addition to this, the society's efforts to ensure the exhibits received artistic judgement led them to identify the individual makers behind each object, which also stressed these attributes.⁴⁸ Although they endeavoured to list the names of all workers, in addition to the companies they worked for, the fact that they felt compelled to attribute them to specific names in order to raise the artistic status of the work suggested they had internalised modern ideas of authorship; Roland Barthes has argued that the notion of authorship is complicit with capitalist ideology – the very thing the Arts and Crafts movement opposed – because it emphasises the individual, rather than the communal.⁴⁹ A key consequence of this faith in the genius is that we looked to

45 Ibid., 3-19.

46 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique on the Judgment of Taste*, 247.

47 Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations: Essays and reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken, 1968), 217-52. Original work published 1935.

48 Walter Crane, "Of the Arts and Crafts Movement: Its General Tendency and Possible Outcome," 23-24.

49 Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image – Music – Text*, trans. S Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 142-48.

the creator for an explanation, rather than trusting our own interpretations of a work.

In the early twentieth century it briefly seemed that craft values might find a place within the category of art, for example, in his 1909 *Essay in Aesthetics*, art critic Roger Fry proposed that the physical form of an object was intimately bound up with the emotion that that artist felt when conceiving it, proposing that:

...in our reaction to a work of art there is something more—there is the consciousness of purpose, the consciousness of a peculiar relation of sympathy with the man who made this thing in order to arouse precisely the sensations we experience.⁵⁰

However, although the production of the work became pivotal to the inculcation of those responses, he also claimed that whilst it might be necessary for “higher works of art,” such as Rembrandt or Degas paintings to sacrifice beauty in order to arouse the emotions of the viewer, there was no excuse for a china pot being ugly.⁵¹ The potter, who was unable to transcend utilitarian form to achieve the holy grail of disinterested contemplation –a state wherein the purely visual nature of a work might encourage revelatory understanding –, was, thus, denied such agency. Furthermore, Fry later recanted his position, influenced by fellow critic Clive Bell, who surmised that it was the aesthetic feeling produced when one encountered a work, rather than the artist’s expression of emotion that mattered.⁵² For Bell, it was ‘significant form,’ determined by the aesthetic response to forms and the relations of elements such as line and colour, which was the distinguishing characteristic of an artwork. More importantly for the nascent studio pottery movement, for which it offered an alternative to craft-centred readings, he also extended this insight

50 Roger Fry, “Essay in Aesthetics,” in *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, eds. Francis Frascina, Charles Harrison and Deirdre Paul (London: Harper and Row, 1982), 84.

51 Ibid., 84.

52 Roger Fry, R, “Retrospect,” in *Vision and Design*, ed. J.B. Bullen, reprint (New York: Dover Publications, 1998), 188-99. Original published 1920.

to other areas of art practice including “matters of architecture, pottery, textiles...”⁵³

Expanding on the ideas in these writings, in 1924, V&A curator Bernard Rackham and his assistant Herbert Read attempted to establish an aesthetic standard for English pottery, which sought to elevate the critical appreciation of early English earthenware.⁵⁴ Like Fry before them, they made a case for handmade pottery as a mode of direct expression, which was comparable with painting or sculpture.⁵⁵ Evincing an Arts and Crafts-tinged concern with truth to materials, they also produced a set of criteria against which to judge utilitarian forms. In keeping with their belief that “pottery is, at best, an abstract art,” this centred on fitness for function, appropriate materials, appropriate design and complementary, preferably abstract, decoration.⁵⁶ By contrast, they excluded highly decorative forms from their model of pottery as *an* art form. Instead, they held that “a different canon of aesthetic criticism must be applied,” to such objects, suggesting that they might be better judged on their painterly values.⁵⁷

Maintaining a focus on the handmade, Rackham and Read’s *English Pottery* might be seen to provide the beginnings of an artistic lineage for studio pottery, albeit a less restrictive one than the successive generation of critics would outline.⁵⁸ Certainly, they argued against the introduction of forms or techniques from outside the discipline. However, their formalist approach also spotlighted a perceived disjuncture between utilitarian and decorative works, which was to become an increasingly contentious issue as the studio pottery developed. Although this largely affected contemporary practice, which was

53 Clive Bell, *Art*, Project Gutenberg, 2005, 37. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/16917/16917-h/16917-h.htm>. Original published 1914.

54 Read later found fame as an art critic and theorist and received a knighthood in 1953 for services to literature.

55 Bernard Rackham and Herbert Read, *English Pottery* (Wakefield, England: EP Publishing, 1972), 4.

56 Ibid., 6-7.

57 Ibid., 6.

58 Rackham and Read also included decorative wares and statuettes in their publication.

outside of their curatorial remit at the time, display was used to differentiate the two outside the museum.

For one practitioner, William Staite-Murray, pottery was, as Rackham and Read described it, “*an abstract art*.”⁵⁹ He regarded it as a genre in its own right, which stood between painting and sculpture and, to this end, he exhibited with fine artists including Ben and Winifred Nicholson in the Seven and Five society.⁶⁰ The presentation of his work, on plinths, with titles, formed a stark contrast to both the ordered displays of historical decorative pottery specimens in museums and the massed ranks of wares in retail display. It invited the type of detached, aesthetic consideration that Bell considered the key marker of artistic value and which Bourdieu later argued was central to the establishment of “pure” art theory: differentiating art-as-pure-signification from art-as-commodity form.⁶¹ This was a distinction that also sustained art market practices within which the refutation of commercial interests was directly linked to the accumulation of symbolic and reputational capital and their associated (monetary and symbolic) profits.⁶²

Potter and critic Julian Stair has retrospectively claimed that Staite-Murray’s incursion into the fine art gallery was a success story in a period where studio pottery had an opportunity to achieve parity with fine art.⁶³ However, as Harrod has observed, in the interwar period, without an established exhibition system for the crafts “a single maker might exhibit or sell work in a New Bond Street gallery, at the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, with the British Institute of Industrial Art or at a humble agricultural show.”⁶⁴

59 Bernard Rackham and Herbert Read, *English Pottery*, 7.

60 William Staite-Murray, “Pottery from the Artist’s Point of View,” *Artwork* 1, no.4 (1925): 201-5.

61 Pierre Bourdieu, “The Market of Symbolic Goods,” in *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 3.

62 Pierre Bourdieu, “The Production of Belief: Contribution to an Economy of Symbolic Goods,” *Media, Culture and Society*, no. 2 (1980): 261.

63 Julian F. Stair, “Re-inventing the Wheel: The Origins of Studio Pottery,” in *The Persistence of Craft*, ed. Paul Greenhalgh (London: A & C Black, 2002), 49-60.

64 Tanya Harrod, *The Crafts in Britain in the 20th Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 134.

The tale of Staite-Murray's contemporary, Bernard Leach, highlighted the issues this posed for those seeking to locate their practice.

Like Staite-Murray, Leach exhibited art-oriented pots in galleries. However, he also sold less expensive domestic wares in order to make ends meet. As all of his forms were ostensibly functional, context became a crucial means of distinguishing between them: especially in 1927, when he produced concurrent exhibitions that showcased the two strands of his practice. One of these was devoted to *Collectors' Pots* and held at Paterson's Gallery in prestigious Bond Street; the other, for *English Slipware... Ordinary Household Utensils* at the more modest Three Shields Gallery in Holland Park. By reserving his collectors' pieces for the more illustrious venue, Leach created a hierarchical division between his functional and non-functional pottery, capitalizing on each venue's target audience. He further drew a distinction between earthenware, which was aligned with the ordinary, and stoneware, which was sold in the collectors' show. However, he was trying to reap the profits from two markets with incompatible value systems. For Bourdieu:

...producers and vendors of cultural goods who 'go commercial,' condemn themselves, and not only from an ethical or aesthetic point of view, because they deprive themselves of the opportunities open to those who can *recognise* the specific demands of this universe and who, by concealing from themselves and others the interests at stake in their practice, obtain the means of deriving profits from disinterestedness.⁶⁵

Rather than 'going commercial,' at this stage Leach attempted to differentiate between the symbolic and the commercial aspects of his own practice. In doing so, he made his economic interest apparent, diluting his personal brand and, therefore, reputational capital.

The lack of an established exhibition system, which Harrod highlighted, might be seen to indicate that studio pottery practice and the crafts were not highly institutionalised at this point. However, at the same time, bruised by his

65 Pierre Bourdieu, "The Production of Belief: Contribution to an Economy of Symbolic Goods," 262.

encounters with the artworld, Leach began to develop an influential, but separate, framework for producing and understanding studio pottery that would accelerate this process. In a now infamous tirade against the art world in *A Potter's Outlook* (1928) he pronounced:

What have the artist potters been doing all this while? Working by hand to please ourselves as artists first and therefore producing only limited and expensive pieces, we have been supported by collectors, purists, cranks and "arty people" rather than by the normal man or woman...and consequently most of our pots have been still-born; they have not had the breath of reality in them: it has been a game.⁶⁶

Trivialising attempts to separate art-oriented studio pottery from useful wares, he implied that producing individual works was inauthentic. However, his turn against the collectors he had courted at Paterson's Gallery also provided theoretical justification for his move towards production pottery at a time when he faced commercial troubles and should be read with that in mind.

Leach's text was produced amidst the turmoil of the inter-war period, but it was not until some time after the Second World War had ended that a publication he produced in 1940 – *A Potter's Book* thrust him into the spotlight. Fusing stylistic doctrine and lifestyle guidance with detailed technical instruction: it was a complete how-to, which extended from making to living.

2. Looking for a home

De Waal has identified the period of Leach's two shows as the genesis of a distinctive craft world.⁶⁷ However, as Harrod has shown, ceramics continued to be shown alongside fine art and as part of high-end room sets in galleries such as The Little Gallery during the interwar period.⁶⁸ It was, instead, when the Second World War commenced that crafts organisations, hit by rationing and

66 Bernard Leach, *A Potter's Outlook* (Sussex: New Handworkers' Gallery and St Dominic's Press, 1928), n.p.

67 Edmund de Waal, *Bernard Leach* (London: Tate Gallery Publishing, 1998).

68 Tanya Harrod, *The Crafts in Britain in the 20th Century*, 126-135.

government restrictions, were driven to consolidate. Exposition, which provided both a means of articulating messages about the value of the crafts and a showcase for potential buyers, was, therefore, a key concern at this point. Leach and Muriel Rose (former manager of the Little Gallery) proposed that an exhibition, which would attract wealthy patrons in the USA, might help to alleviate the situation. The result was the British Council-backed exhibition *Modern British Crafts*. Curated by Rose, it opened at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1942 and toured the USA for a further three years. Comprised of room sets and showcases, the exhibition had a dual role: as well as promoting British crafts, it also stressed the history of cultural exchange between Britain and the USA. As researcher Imogen Hart has noted, it focused on continuity rather than change, to avoid associations with propaganda, holding up the Arts and Crafts movement, which had had great influence in both Britain and the USA, as an example.⁶⁹ It, thus, articulated a view of the crafts that offered harmony in a time of great upheaval. It was this same sense of security that was to make Leach's ideas so appealing.

In 'Towards a Standard,' - the first chapter of *A Potter's Book* - Leach attempted to stake out a place for the 'artist-craftsman' potter after the rise of industry.⁷⁰ He praised the unity of hand and mind in craft production and was critical of the cult of the individual artist in the West, creating an unfavourable comparison with the East where, he argued, the suppression of ego and the fusion of beauty and utility created greater harmony in life.⁷¹ Such romanticised versions of the past have since been critiqued for their dependence on a historically and/or geographically remote and undifferentiated other, which is seen to possess qualities that Western society

69 Imogen Hart, "The Exhibition of Modern British Crafts' in the United States," presented at *In the Same Boat: British and American Visual Culture During the Second World War*, History of Art department, Yale University, May 8-9, 2015. MP4, accessed June 20, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ZD9RBU2SFA>.

70 Bernard Leach, "Towards a Standard," in *A Potter's Book* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber), 1-27. Original published 1940.

71 Ibid., 26.

has lost.⁷² Nevertheless, the fictive harmony that Leach evoked appealed to those seeking the security of community, tradition and moral satisfaction in the wake of two world wars. Yet, the blueprint he provided also came with an aesthetic standard. Lamenting the fact that there was a loose “criterion of beauty,” for other art forms, but none for the artist craftsman, he proposed that items including Japanese ceremonial tea wares, which combined utility and a spare form of beauty, represented the pinnacle of pottery production.⁷³ Whilst he spoke of synthesis – of emulating the mind-set of those who set the ‘standard’ – many of those who took his text as their bible, instead, focused on his stylistic preferences. The pared-down decoration and simplicity of the works he admired, thus, became ciphers for his ideology: an issue that was to lead to the proliferation of derivative and unimaginative pots in the ensuing decades.

Whilst Leach focused on re-shaping production values through discourse, other potters refused to speak about their work or intentions: foremost amongst whom were Lucie Rie and Hans Coper. Rie’s refined, Bauhaus-inspired pots offered an alternative take on function, which was in line with European Modernist design, whilst her fellow émigré and close friend, Coper, began to test the limits of the potted form, concentrating on the subtle variations gained through repetition. Ceramic historian Jeffrey Jones has since suggested their silence played a pivotal role in framing their work. Speculating that it might be linked to their experiences as European émigrés, who had fled the atrocities that surrounded the Second World War and the Modernist search for aesthetic purity, he has argued that their silence is strategic – as much a part of dialogue as speaking.⁷⁴ However, the much-quoted

⁷² Lacking the exoticising fervour that is central to Said’s notion of *Orientalism* (1978), Leach’s focus might be seen to combine romantic primitivism with the aesthetic preferences of late nineteenth-century Japonisme.

⁷³ Bernard Leach, *A Potter’s Book*, 7.

⁷⁴ Jeffrey Jones, “Keeping Quiet and Finding a Voice: Ceramics and the Art of Silence,” *Interpreting Ceramics*, no. 5 (2004), accessed October 24, 2011,

introduction to Coper's 1969 exhibition at the V&A is both an exception and a potential explanation:

Practicing a craft with ambiguous reference to purpose and function one has occasion to face absurdity. More than anything, somewhat like a demented piano-tuner, one is trying to approximate a phantom pitch. One is apt to take refuge in pseudo-principles, which crumble. Still, the routine of work remains. One deals with the facts.⁷⁵

This might be read as an acknowledgement that studio pottery such as his did not fit within existing frameworks. Unlike Leach, who attempted to create one, Coper, instead, focused on his own production processes, leaving the reception to others.

To some extent, that silence gave the work an ambiguity that suited those who were trying to find a place for craft disciplines in a post-war funding landscape that favoured industrial design. In 1944, as the Second World War was reaching a climax, the Board of Trade founded a body devoted to precisely that area of practice. Following in the footsteps of earlier efforts to marry design reform to economic prosperity, such as those that led to the establishment of the Schools of Design and the V&A in the mid 1800s, The Council of Industrial Design (COID), placed an emphasis on the role that good design could play in rebuilding Britain's manufacturing industries.⁷⁶ By contrast, hit by high taxes and government restrictions on labour, materials and space, those who focused on craft practice, were struggling to support themselves.⁷⁷

Exposition played an explicit role in the articulation of the COID's message – just as it had in 1851 when the Great Exhibition was used to market British manufactures and re-shape public taste. In fact, in 1946, the V&A hosted

<http://interpretingceramics.com/issue005/keepingquiet.htm>; Susan Sontag, "The Aesthetics of Silence," in *Styles of Radical Will*, Reprint (New York: Picador, 2002), 3-34.

75 Hans Coper, "Introduction," in *Collingwood-Coper: Rugs and Wallhangings by Peter Collingwood: Pots by Hans Coper*, ed. Victoria and Albert Museum (London: HMSO, 1969), n.p.

76 Lucy Bullivant, "Public Response to Britain Can Make It," in *Did Britain Make It? British Design in Context 1946-86*, ed. Penny Sparke (London: Design Council, 1986), 145-55.

77 James Noel White, "The First Crafts Centre of Great Britain," *Journal of Design History* 2, no. 2/3 (1989): 207-214.

Britain Can Make It: an exhibition that included room displays that offered scenarios within which products that met with the COID's notions of good taste were framed as integral parts of desirable, efficient modern lifestyles. As former Deputy Director of the COID, James Noel-White, has reflected, exposition was also central to the battle to sustain the crafts in this period.⁷⁸ Indeed, he viewed two exhibitions - *Modern British Crafts* (1942) and the Crafts Advisory Committee's inaugural exhibition *The Craftsman's Art* (1973) as markers of the crisis and recovery of the crafts.⁷⁹

Certainly, inspired by his involvement in *Modern British Crafts*, John Farleigh, President of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, began to argue that a permanent exhibition space was an essential means of promoting the crafts. Nevertheless, although the rhetoric of crafts organisations at the time centred on the value of fine craftsmanship in its own right, when their joint committee – The Crafts Centre of Great Britain (CCGB) – was awarded a government grant in 1948, it was with the proviso that the crafts should demonstrate their humanizing influence on industrial design.⁸⁰

The issues that this model posed for the CCGB showroom, which opened in 1950, were exemplified by another act of exposition: *The Festival of Britain* (1951). There, Leachian standard ware was shown in the country pavilions and individual pots, which bore his influence, were sited in the 'British Craftsman' and 'Nature' sections. With little to suggest any link to contemporary design, the display, instead, conveyed a sense of continuity similar to that of *Modern British Crafts*. This gesture of showing might be seen to highlight the gap between the statements used to justify the funding of the showroom and both the work and ideologies of the craftsman potter.

78 Ibid., 209.

79 Ibid., 208.

80 Tanya Harrod, *Factfile on the History of the Crafts Council* (Great Britain: The Crafts Council, 1994); James Noel White, "The First Crafts Centre of Great Britain." The five founding societies of the Crafts Centre of Great Britain were The Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society; The Red Rose Guild; the Senefelder Club; the Society of Scribes and Illuminators and the Society of Wood Engravers.

By contrast, Rie and Coper's works at the Festival were located in a room set designed by Robin Day where, although possessing an individualism that was somewhat at odds with the message of good design for all, they did not seem out of place. Indeed, they might be seen to exemplify the COID's model of good taste in this period, which historian Jonathan Woodham has described as:

a 'stripped down' aesthetic that blended those British arts and crafts values that respected materials and honesty of construction with the more progressive trends of modernism that had begun to influence British design from the late 1920s.⁸¹

The duo's silence and the abstract nature of Coper's pots, in particular, also made it easier to slot their work into different narratives. Indeed, there was a joint Rie and Coper exhibition at the Berkeley Galleries in London's prestigious Mayfair that same year. As researcher Sophie Heath has observed, the gallery's shows focused on the ancient and tribal artefacts that many modernist artists invested with a desirable purity of expression.⁸² Theorists such as Arthur C. Danto have since critiqued displays that focused on the formal qualities of these objects, arguing that they attempted to fit them into Western notions of art, rather than the value frameworks within the cultures where they were made.⁸³ However, this decontextualisation might be seen to form a perfect fit with Rie and Coper's refusal to interpret. As Jones has suggested "Silence not only surrounds them and defends them, it reveals and locates them too. That silence which hides them from us also shows us where they are."⁸⁴

Whilst Rie and Coper embraced quietude, the divergent attitudes within the societies that founded the CCGB led to cacophonous, discord. Tanya Harrod's analyses of its fortunes provide greater detail on these quarrels than

81 Jonathan Woodham, "Design and Everyday Life at the Britain Can Make it Exhibition, 1946: 'Stripes, Spots, White Wood and Homespun Versus Chintzy Armchairs and Iron Bedsteads with Brass Knobs,'" *Journal of Architecture* 9 (2004): 463-476.

82 Sophie Heath, "The Lucie Rie archive at the Crafts Study centre," Visual Arts Data Service, accessed May 11, 2012, <http://www.vads.ac.uk/learning/csc/rie/essay.html#note92>.

83 Arthur C. Danto, "Artifact and Art," in *ART/Artifact*, ed. Susan Vogel (New York: The Center for African Art and Prestel Verlag, 1988): 18-32.

84 Jeffrey Jones, "Keeping Quiet and Finding a Voice: Ceramics and the Art of Silence."

this discussion can accommodate.⁸⁵ These disagreements, coupled with the crippling lack of underfunding that resulted from the Centre's failure to fulfil its commitment to become self-supporting, took centre stage. However, the CCGB also provided a platform for innovative practice, showing work of those such as William Newland, Nicholas Vergette and Margaret Hine (1954), who created boldly decorated tin-glazed earthenwares that were a world away from the Leach standard and Ruth Duckworth (1964), who explored the sculptural potential of fired clay.⁸⁶ Despite this, these artists were out of step with the dominant tendencies in craft and design in Britain at the time and struggled to locate their work. Consequently, Duckworth moved to the USA in the 1960s, whilst Newland, Vergette and Hine (the so-called 'Picassoettes') only gained true recognition after Harrod published her aptly titled article *The Forgotten Fifties* in 1989.⁸⁷

The ambiguous identity of studio ceramic practice in the UK contrasted with the heated debate about the categorisation of non-functional studio ceramics in the USA. There, people such as Peter Voulkos had begun to move away from the wheel-thrown domestic wares towards hand-built sculptural forms. Deconstructing the vessel, they stretched pottery to its limits, raising questions about how to assess ceramic practice that intersected with the tenets of other art forms. Rose Slivka attempted to tackle this issue in her now renowned article 'The New Ceramic Presence' in *Craft Horizons* (1961), polarising opinion.⁸⁸ For Slivka, the abstract expressionist painters' emphasis on spontaneity, medium, and handling had exerted a liberating effect upon ceramic practice and she, therefore, attempted to forge links between work that manifested this influence and sculpture. To do so, she adopted a top-down

85 Tanya Harrod, *Factfile on the History of the Crafts Council*; Tanya Harrod, *The Crafts in Britain in the 20th Century*.

86 All four were students of Dora Billington, a Crafts Centre of Great Britain Council member whose innovative approach to teaching is discussed in the next chapter. Duckworth exhibited alongside the weaver Peter Collingwood, whose work was equally inventive. See *Dictionary of Women Artists*, vol. 1, ed. Della Gaze (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1997), 470.

87 Tanya Harrod, "The Forgotten '50s," *Crafts*, no. 98 (1989): 30–33.

88 Rose Slivka, "The New Ceramic Presence," *Craft Horizons* 4 (July/August, 1961): 31–37.

model, which stressed the one-way flow of influence from fine art to the crafts. Slivka also created a hierarchical distinction between non-functional works, which she accorded the potential to ascend to the category of sculpture and those with a connection to utility, which she confined to the crafts. In contrast to craft-centred theories of ceramics, which opposed hand production to industrial production, this elevated non-functional over functional form. Whilst Staite-Murray earlier argued that studio pottery was *an* art form, she highlighted a renewed and growing concern with using ceramic materials and processes to create art.

3. Crafting a presence

Britain lacked an equivalent critical platform to *Craft Horizons* at this time. However, craft galleries were in the ascendant. Display spaces thus became key battlegrounds for those attempting to market or re-frame ceramics and the crafts. There were numerous retail outlets, many of which included gallery spaces: to name but a few, Primavera (established in London in 1945) opened another gallery in Cambridge in 1959 and The Oxford Gallery was set up in 1968. The British Crafts Centre (BCC) – formerly (and somewhat confusingly) known as the Crafts Council of Great Britain until 1967 – also combined retail and exhibition. Furthermore, rather than selecting work on the basis of its perceived saleability, the Centre accepted work that the maker proposed: an approach that Jeanne Werge Hartley, Chairperson of the Society of Designer Craftsmen, argued created a forum for more experimental and untested work.⁸⁹ However, the path taken by those running the Craftsmen Potters' Shop, which opened in May 1960 and which sold and acted as a "show case" for the work of

⁸⁹ Jeanne Werge Hartley, "Off Centre. A Column of Dissent. Organization or Destruction?" *Ceramic Review*, no. 54 (1978): 12.

those accepted for full membership of the CPA, hinted at the burgeoning institutionalisation of ceramic practice.⁹⁰

An industrial and provident society, the social nature of the enterprise was stressed, with CPA members contributing their time to renovate the shop space. Nevertheless, they faced similar challenges to other committee-based organizations when it came to selection criteria: the tastes of the majority of the membership shaped the constitution of the elected council and, consequently, the type of work shown. As Secretary, David Canter professed:

When the shop first opened, there was a non-selective principle of membership in operation, but it was found that this resulted in an unacceptable standard of work and a system was introduced whereby applicants for full membership with exhibiting rights had to satisfy the Council's Selection Committee as to the quality of work they would send in.⁹¹

In many ways, the selection committee served as an 'establishment,' as Canter admitted when he launched *Ceramic Review*.⁹² Certainly, the idea that there was an 'unacceptable standard,' suggests there was a loosely agreed 'acceptable standard.' Initially, as the organisation's title indicated, that standard was grounded in studio pottery tradition and craft values. However, the framework of assessment became less clear as the 1960s wore on and ceramists began to produce works that moved away from pottery and towards fine art and sculpture. Consequently, when the CPA launched its magazine in 1970, it decided to call it *Ceramic Review*. Using the term 'ceramics' rather than pottery, the title created the impression of continuity and commonality. It also reflected changes in education, wherein ceramic courses within college art departments were beginning to supersede vocational pottery courses.⁹³ Yet there was a growing tension between studio pottery and the type of work emerging from

90 David Canter, "The Craftsman Potters Shop," (sic) *Ceramic Review*, no. 11 (1970): 4-6.

91 Ibid.

92 David Canter, "From the Secretary's Desk," *Ceramic Review*, no. 1 (1970): 2.

93 This issue is addressed in more detail in the next chapter.

such courses at this time.⁹⁴ The word 'ceramics,' therefore, proved sufficiently ambiguous to allow existing institutions, such as courses, practitioners' organisations and galleries, to accommodate divergent forms of clay practice on the basis of the maker's affiliation to medium, without examining the issues this might pose for those trying to assess their merit, artistic or otherwise.

Produced against this backdrop, Philip Rawson's comprehensive *Ceramics* (1971) offered a different take on medium. Like Fry, Rackham, Read and Leach, Rawson attempted to provide a set of criteria against which to judge ceramics past and present. Nevertheless, although he discussed formal qualities, his approach was closer to the anthropological theories that would reshape museum practice in the ensuing decades. Many of the issues he considered, from symbolism, tactile value and physical context (total environment) to personal meaning and object histories are now standard modes of analysis within museums. However, despite embracing pluralism, Rawson described ceramics as "the art based upon pottery," and expressed a continued faith in the idea that truth to materials yielded authentic work.⁹⁵ Declaring that there was a point where ceramics becomes sculpture, which was "far beyond the purview of the potter," he gestured to an understanding of 'ceramics' that encompassed use in a broader sense, but which did not attempt to claim the use of clay within other artistic frameworks.⁹⁶

'Institutional critique,' emerged amidst this climate and the 1970s was also a period when groups of artists who felt excluded by museums and galleries began to establish alternative exhibition spaces.⁹⁷ By contrast,

94 David Canter, "From the Secretary's Desk," *Ceramic Review*, no. 1 (1970): 2.

95 Philip Rawson, *Ceramics* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 205.

96 *Ibid.*, 206.

97 Claire Glossop, "A Revolution in the Gallery: From the Arts Council to the Artist," in *Sculpture in 20th-Century Britain*, ed. Henry Moore Institute (Leeds: Henry Moore Institute, 2003). As Glossop addresses in detail, although the Arts Council of Great Britain had provided support for 'the living arts' since 1946, the network of galleries it created in the late 1960s and 1970s, which included – amongst others – the Midland Group Gallery, the Whitechapel Art Gallery, the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) and Kettle's Yard were ill-equipped to deal with time-based, performative and ephemeral sculptural practices that were emerging at this point. This led artists such as Stuart Brisley, Richard Wilson and Susan Hiller to exhibit in

museums had played a minimal role in the consecration of studio ceramic works until this point and only started to collect and display them on a more regular basis in that decade. Moreover, the galleries that exhibited studio ceramics were relatively new and their influence diffused. To a degree, galleries such as the Oxford Gallery could be regarded as 'alternative spaces.' Apparently launched in protest when the Bear Lane Gallery refused to acknowledge the artistic merit of Rie's work, it soon made its name as a venue that displayed studio ceramics alongside and as fine art.⁹⁸ Yet, as a commercial enterprise, it is also likely that the founders were aware of the financial opportunities that this gap in provision enabled. Furthermore, without established critical networks to appraise these exhibitions and with accompanying texts limited to lists of names and prices, the discursive impact of these ventures was limited.

However, in the 1960s, as hand-making became a key part of the countercultural ideology – a means of resisting the commodification of daily life – there were concerted efforts to find new ways of sustaining craft activity. This 'craft revival' resulted in the foundation of the Crafts Advisory Committee. Formally launched on 28 July 1971, Lord Eccles – who assumed responsibility for arts funding bodies that year – spearheaded the initiative, declaring that it would serve the needs of the 'artist craftsman.'⁹⁹ Called upon to explain that term, Secretary Victor Margrie propounded:

alternative spaces such as London's Acme Gallery (1976-1981) and Matt's Gallery (1979 to present).

98 Amanda Game, "Oxford Blues," *Crafts*, no. 169 (2001): 64-5. The establishment of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society in 1887 and the "turn to the craft gallery," that Harrod identified, in the '40s had, likewise, served as alternative spaces. However, whilst the first was explicitly critical of the Royal Academy's focus on painting, to the exclusion of decorative arts, the latter was more complicated. Whilst Leach was certainly disillusioned with the artworld, this was less an attempt to argue for art status and more an ideologically motivated, self-imposed, exile, which was intended to re-frame ceramics as objects for the domestic use.

99 Parliamentary Debates, House of Lords, 5th Series, vol. 323, 28 July 1971, Lord Ecclesia announces the formation of the Crafts Advisory Committee.

We have not attempted to define it, just to use it; to content ourselves with the wide interpretation, which covers those craftsmen who, often rooted in traditional techniques, have an aim, which extends beyond reproduction of past styles and methods.¹⁰⁰

This vagueness served to support innovative approaches to ceramics, but it also posed a conundrum for those with ceramic training and fine art ambitions: the CAC's notion of the "artist craftsman," differentiated it from the two terms it encompassed. In maintaining a 'selective index' of craftspeople, divided into categories such as 'potters,' 'bookbinders,' 'weavers,' 'jewellers' and 'furniture makers,' it also invited self-identification with that narrow label, leaving room for those who employed craft skills outside 'the crafts.'¹⁰¹ However, providing 'setting up grants,' which enabled those working in media associated with the crafts to set up their own studios and businesses, and unprecedented levels of support for those producing more experimental work, it had understandable appeal.¹⁰² Reflecting on the situation, *Ceramic Review* editors Eileen Lewenstein and Emmanuel Cooper highlighted the inadequacy of sweeping terms such as art and craft when faced by contemporary practice, suggesting the divisions between governmental art and craft funding made it difficult to separate the work from these frameworks.¹⁰³ Yet, they did not address the complicity of their own organisation in imposing another framework – that of 'ceramics.' They thus cemented ceramic practice to the crafts as a distinct group of practices at the very moment when the interdisciplinarity that Slivka had highlighted had opened the door to its application within other artistic frameworks.

100 Ibid. Victor Margie, 'The work of the Crafts Advisory Committee', *Museums Journal* 74, no. 3 (1974): 117-118.

101 Tanya Harrod, *Factfile on the History of the Crafts Council*, 8.

102 United Kingdom, Hansard Parliamentary Debates, January 24, 1990, accessed May 12, 2014, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198990/cmhansrd/1990-01-24/Writtens-1.html> Support for those wishing to establish their own businesses peaked between 1974 -77, with grant recipients in this period including future famous names such as Caroline Broadhead (jewellery); Fred Baier (furniture); Michael Rowe (metal).

103 Emmanuel Lewenstein and Emmanuel Cooper, "An Imaginative Leap," *Ceramic Review*, no. 56 (1979): 3.

Although the CAC produced its first major exhibition – *The Craftsman's Art* – in collaboration with the V&A in 1973, and supported many others, it opened its own gallery in the same year. With the founding of *Crafts* magazine in 1974, the CAC, therefore, operated vehicles for the production, dissemination and evaluation of exhibitions, exercising a considerable degree of control over the critical discourse around the practices that it enveloped.

4. Institutionalisation

Whilst Margrie's definition of the 'artist craftsman' was broad enough to encompass what was labelled 'ceramic sculpture,' sculpture did not easily fit into assessment frameworks that were designed for studio pottery and which focused on technical detail. This was an issue that was particularly apparent *Ceramic Review*, which, true to its declared focus on medium, also featured works by artists who had no commitment to 'ceramics.' For example, in 1978 they printed a small photograph of part of John Mason's *Hudson River Series*: a work comprised of ten interrelated sculptures which were made from readymade firebricks and designed for specific museum spaces in the USA.¹⁰⁴ However, it was merely accompanied by a brief title and the name of the exhibition, with no critical analysis. Judy Chicago's iconic feminist artwork *The Dinner Party* (1974-79) fared a little better in 1984, perhaps because it was being exhibited in Edinburgh at the time. The work centres on three long tables in a triangular formation with thirty-nine place settings, each dedicated to a Western woman who was deemed of historical importance. The names of 999 more are also inscribed on the tiled floor on which it sits. The place settings include embroidered runners, gold ceramic chalices and plates that are, controversially, decorated with designs based on vulva and butterfly forms tailored to the individual to whom they are devoted. As the anonymous

¹⁰⁴ *Ceramic Review*, "John Mason – Installations [illus.]," *Ceramic Review*, no. 70 (1978): 29; Hudson River Museum, *John Mason. Installations from the Hudson River Series* (New York: Hudson River Museum, 1978).

reviewer pointed out “Chicago defends her work from attacks by (mainly male) critics by pointing out that it is seen as craft, which is usually dismissed, because it is traditionally women’s media, women’s art.”¹⁰⁵ Letters of support and vitriolic responses were also printed on the *Letters* page of *Ceramic Review* issue 91: whilst Katie Horsman from Edinburgh described it as “a tour-de-force of co-ordinated skills and techniques and ideas: a unique artistic collaboration,” John Stuart from Exeter described it as a ‘remarkably nasty thing’ arguing that “What is so awful about it is that while so many of the women commemorated by it have been genuinely creative people, the only thing that matters about them, in the eyes of other women, is their sex. The only memorial to each of them is an enormous twat.” However, this was the extent of the critical discussion of the work and there was no analysis of the implications that Chicago’s challenge on the exclusion of craft media from fine art might have had for ceramists.

Although American sculptural ceramic works of the type Slivka addressed were shown in British galleries in the 1960s, *Ceramic Review* and *Crafts* gave them greater prominence for a short period in the 1970s. In particular, Tony Hepburn, a UK-based ceramist whose works and approach were heavily influenced by developments in the USA, made a concerted effort to encourage debate about the ceramics-sculpture relationship, writing several articles on American practice.¹⁰⁶ Photographs and degree show reviews also indicated that more trained ceramists were turning to sculpture. However, they constituted a small percentage of the magazines’ coverage. Nonetheless, images published in the magazine and short reviews of exhibitions such as Cartwright Hall’s *Modern Ceramics ‘71*, Sunderland Arts Centre’s *State of Clay* (1978) and the Hepburn-organised *Clay Sculpture* (1980) at Yorkshire Sculpture Park suggest that

¹⁰⁵ *Ceramic Review*, “The Dinner Party – Judy Chicago,” *Ceramic Review*, no. 89 (1984): 21. *The Dinner Party* was also shown in London in 1985. British History Online, “Penton Street and Chapel Market Area,” accessed August 12, 2015, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vol47/pp373-404#h2-0008>.

¹⁰⁶ Tony Hepburn and Michael Cardew, “International Ceramics 1972,” *Ceramic Review*, no. 17 (1972): 10-11; Tony Hepburn, “American Ceramics 1970,” *Ceramic Review* 8 (1971): 10-12.

exhibitions may have provided a means through which to address the issues posed by this pluralism. Although occupying a marginal position within existing histories of ceramics, they constitute a discursive engagement with art-oriented ceramic practice that challenged its wholesale absorption into the crafts.

By the late 1970s and early '80s, the rise of a group of young ceramists that included recent graduates Jacqueline Poncelet, Glenys Barton, Alison Britton, Carol McNicoll, Martin Smith, Jill Crowley and Richard Slee, as well as more established figures like Gordon Baldwin, Gillian Lowndes, Janice Tchalenko and Walter Keeler began to side-line these debates. Labelled 'The New Ceramics,' their work – much of it grounded in pottery tradition – offered vibrant alternatives to Leach-inspired Anglo-oriental stoneware. The career trajectories of the younger practitioners, in particular, were steep: although they challenged the status quo, they quickly became the figureheads of the Crafts Council. They, therefore, attracted the ire of some of those working in both more traditional and more interdisciplinary manners, whose work they often overshadowed, as well as critics such as Peter Fuller who dismissed it as "the trendy trash of Poncelet and Co."¹⁰⁷

Of course, the Crafts Council continued to support a range of practices in a number of ways, from providing financial support for individuals to establish studios to purchasing their work to supporting exhibitions. However, in the 1980s, a concern with developing a critical framework for the crafts, which would raise their status, gave certain perspectives greater publicity. *Crafts* magazine, under the editorship of Martina Margetts commissioned critics and historians such as Fuller, Peter Dormer, Christopher Reid and Rosemary Hill to engage with the issues surrounding contemporary practice. It also enlisted practitioners to write about their work.¹⁰⁸ Often their opinions conflicted with

107 Peter Fuller, "Melting Pot. Three Potters and Three Critics Review the Current Ceramics Scene, More Diverse (and Divided?) Than Ever," *Crafts*, no. 75 (1985): 49.

108 Tanya Harrod, "Crafts," *Journal of Design History*, 7, no. 4 (1994) 299-301.

each other and those of other contributors, as well as the direction of the Crafts Council.

Ceramist Alison Britton was a particularly active voice at this time. She was amongst a group of artists and critics who sought to raise the profile of ornamental pottery as a distinct art form. For example, writing "Sèvres with Krazy Kat" (1983): an article commissioned by *Crafts*, which focused on the issue of decoration.¹⁰⁹ Discussing both surface pattern and the decorative function of an object, she stated that, for her, painting pictures on pots produced unsatisfactory results and a synthesis of form and decoration was more desirable. However, whilst her description of how, in a collaboration between American ceramists Robert Hudson and Richard Shaw, the decoration 'had become the thing itself' begged to be linked with a discussion of the Pattern and Decoration movement in art, she restricted her discussion to pottery, instead, articulating the idea that her and her peer-group were defined by their 'anti-Orientalist' inspirations: retaining an appreciation for, but diverging from Leach.

"Sèvres with Krazy Kat" expanded upon the ideas Britton had voiced in an earlier essay, which she had written for the catalogue for *The Maker's Eye* (1981): an exhibition organised by the Crafts Council, which invited crafts practitioners to curate displays that represented their view of craft. In that essay she wrote about feeling like part of a group of artist-craftspeople, which had developed a shared interest in 'the outer limits of function' over the previous ten years and described the frisson created by the 'double presence' of certain pots, in which the active and the contemplative are held in tension.¹¹⁰ Britton admitted that this self-referential turn - exploring the pot as subject and object - might be viewed as the death throes of a discipline that had been unpinned from its basis in necessity, but hoped that it might, instead, be aligned with Modernism in the other arts.

109 Alison Britton, "Sèvres with Krazy Kat," *Crafts*, no. 61 (1983): 18-23.

110 Alison Britton, "Untitled," in Crafts Council, ed. *The Maker's Eye* (London: Crafts Council, 1981), 16.

However, Britton's efforts to align pottery such as her own with Modernism were beset by contradictions. Elissa Auther has made a convincing argument that 'the decorative' served as a key site through which Clement Greenberg – the figurehead of High Modernist art theory – distinguished 'high' and 'low' art.¹¹¹ Viewed through this lens, the claims Britton made are legible as attempts to fulfill his criteria for the former. For example, writing about the synthesis of form and decoration and 'double presence,' she distanced her work from superficially ornamented work, which Greenberg had criticized. Instead, she aligned it with the abstract works of the painters such as Jackson Pollock, who Greenberg held in great esteem, and in whose works he argued, "we might see [...] not equivalences, but an hallucinated uniformity."¹¹² Her allusion to self-referentiality also conformed to the doctrine of medium specificity set out in Greenberg's 'Modernist Painting,' in which he proposed:

The essence of Modernism lies [...] in the use of the characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline in itself – not in order to subvert it but to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence.¹¹³

However, the notion that her peer group "need and recognize tradition, not in order to follow it, as perhaps the Orientalists have been inclined to do, but to mix it all up and try to invent freely on top of it"¹¹⁴ evidenced an ad-hoc approach to historical syntax that contemporary critics such as Fredric Jameson have claimed were characteristically 'postmodern.'¹¹⁵

111 Elissa Auther, "The Decorative, Abstraction and the Hierarchy of Art and Craft in the Art Criticism of Clement Greenberg," *Oxford Art Journal* 27, no. 3 (2004): 339-364.

112 Clement Greenberg, "The Crisis of the Easel Picture," in John O' Brien, ed. *Clement Greenberg. The Collected Essays and Criticism vol. 2: Arrogant Purpose 1945-1949* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1986), 222. Original published 1948.

113 Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," in John O' Brien, ed. *Clement Greenberg. The Collected Essays, vol. 4. Modernism with a Vengeance 1957-1969* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1986), 85. Original published 1961.

114 Alison Britton, "Sèvres with Krazy Kat," 21.

115 Frederick Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," in *Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (London: Pluto Press, 1985), 111-125.

Offering a frame through which to view contemporary work, Britton's words have become emblematic of that time.¹¹⁶ As art critic Boris Ford suggested of her *Maker's Eye* essay: "...it succinctly captures the atmosphere surrounding the 'return to the crafts' (or should that be the 'turn to the crafts'?)" of the 1970s and '80s."¹¹⁷ That atmosphere was one of ambiguity and oscillation between medium-specific training and interdisciplinary innovation. However, Britton's words have, perhaps, been seized upon because there were few texts that critically engaged with the identity of ceramics at the time. The *Maker's Eye* exhibition, which required her to articulate an image of the crafts using objects, rather than words, therefore, also merits closer examination. As Harrod later reflected:

The show looked wonderful but suggested that 'craft' had a complicated unstable identity. Here was unknown territory, a world, if not quite a discipline, a field apparently undecided about itself.¹¹⁸

To some extent, Britton's retreat to medium-specificity accorded with that of Peter Dormer, for whose *New Ceramics: Trends and Traditions* (1986) – the most thorough attempt to address 'ceramics' in this era – she wrote the introduction. Dormer also asserted that the contemporary pot's place was as part of a decorative tradition, acknowledging that contemporary hand-made pots were rarely made or purchased on the grounds of pure necessity. However, he argued that the applied arts should not play an avant-garde role but should, instead, serve as expressions of the self and of everyday values, reminding readers that pottery was 'a domestic art of familiar forms.'¹¹⁹ This contrasted with Britton's efforts to align decorative pottery with painting.

116 Britton herself referenced the essay in her introduction to Peter Dormer's 1986 book *The New Ceramics: Trends and Traditions* and it has also been reproduced in anthologies of key texts such as Glenn Adamson's *Craft Reader* (2010).

117 Boris Ford, *The Cambridge Cultural History of Britain: Modern Britain* (Cambridge, New York and Victoria: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 193.

118 Tanya Harrod, "Fifty Moments that Changed Craft," *Crafts*, no. 250 (2014): 46.

119 Peter Dormer, *The New Ceramics: Trends and Traditions* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986), 24.

Both Britton and Dormer separated pottery from sculpture, with Dormer arguing that sculpture was generally “concerned with a much wider metaphorical and conceptual range than is normally expected of or possible in pottery.”¹²⁰ He suggested that attempts to argue for ‘ceramic sculpture’ were motivated by the desire to gain greater status for pottery, challenge pottery’s exclusion from modernism, and, thus, achieve higher prices. Instead, he argued, good potters, such as Voulikos could elevate pottery’s status on its own terms. Yet, his use of the term ‘ceramics,’ which might be seen to described a broader domain than pottery, jarred with his otherwise convincing argument.

Of course, this viewpoint wasn’t without critics, for example, in a vitriolic article titled ‘A Culture of Doodles’ (1983), published three issues after “Sèvres with Krazy Kat,” Christopher Reid attacked the work of Britton and her peer group. He also seized the opportunity to criticize the Crafts Council for promoting their work so heavily, railing against the influence that modernist fine-art practice had exerted on the crafts. However, it was not a printed text, but the exhibition *Fast Forward: New Directions in British Ceramics* (1985) that brought the perceived dichotomy by Leach-inspired traditionalists and the now-established group of Crafts Council-supported art school graduates to a head. Organised by Dormer and closely related to the ideas he would set out in *The New Ceramics*, the exhibition was held at London’s Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA). It was accompanied by a series of seminars in which critics and practitioners debated issues that it raised.

One of those seminars – *Pot Luck: Studio Pottery Today* – proved particularly lively.¹²¹ It took the subject of tradition as a starting point, with Dormer declaring that potters must engage with tradition, but not blindly imitate: accusing Leach’s followers (although not Leach himself) of doing the

¹²⁰ Ibid., 12.

¹²¹ Institute of Contemporary Art, “Pot Luck – British Studio Pottery Today,” session at *The Crafts in Question*, Institute of Contemporary Art, London, April 30, 1985, accessed 14 January, 2013, <http://sounds.bl.uk/Arts-literature-and-performance/ICA-talks/024M-C0095X0174XX-0100V0>.

latter. He argued that it was important for the exhibition's audience to learn that pottery had its own diverse roots. Others, including V&A curator Oliver Watson, concurred with Dormer that Leach's influence had masked a broader history of ceramics: an observation that reflected his keen professional engagement with that broader history. Fuller and David Leach countered this perspective. For Fuller, Coper and the generation of students he taught at the Royal College of Art (which included Britton and Fritsch) had come to regard the pot only as artistic object, leading ceramics into a cul-de-sac, with the full support of the Crafts Council. Joining the debate and echoing Reid, Leach's son, David also expressed his dismay at the dominance of the group of Crafts Council-supported avant-garde makers and blamed the Council's continued failure to distinguish the crafts from art for the unrest that had led to these heated debates about the identity of ceramics.¹²²

These emotionally charged attempts to establish a clear framework against which to assess ceramics and the crafts might be seen to reflect anxieties about their uncertain identity. To choose the ICA – a celebrated white cube art gallery – to argue that ceramics was a domestic art also seemed curious. However, they addressed terminology and rhetoric, rather than objects: something the exhibition contended with. If, as an editorial in *Ceramic Review* observed, the ICA discussions presented a simplistic view and practice was not so clearly polarized in the first place, the dynamic between object and articulation in *Fast Forward* might prove illuminating.¹²³ It also suggested that there were multiple models of 'ceramics' in operation: not only Leach-inspired studio pottery, 'ceramic sculpture' and Dormer's ornamental ceramics, but also ceramics as represented in museums, where different facets of this integrative practice collide.

Whilst he had great ambitions for decorative pottery, eight years later, Dormer added an additional chapter to *New Ceramics* (1994), in which he

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Craft Potters Association of Great Britain, "Ceramics Today," *Ceramic Review*, no. 92 (1985): 35.

suggested that the notion of ceramics as a hand-craft discipline, which he had promoted in the original edition of the book, had been diminished in art schools to the point where the idea of ceramics as an applied art was barely tenable.¹²⁴ He claimed that ceramics had been transformed into a form of fine art since the mid 1980s, arguing that the growth of individualistic work and the lack of a shared vocabulary made it difficult to measure quality in ceramics. However, again, he was caught between ceramics and pottery; between medium-specificity and application, and in an about-turn he suggested that Peter Voulkos's work might hold its own against sculpture, rather than just ceramic sculpture as he had previously claimed.

In the intervening years, critical debate had been more consolidatory. By the late 1980s, *Crafts* had begun to commission articles that reflected on craft history, shifting the focus to heritage, rather than problematic contemporary identities. There were also efforts to re-evaluate the works of ceramists who had explored alternatives to the Anglo-Oriental model. Tanya Harrod's aforementioned article "The Forgotten '50s" (1989), which examined the work of the trio that Leach was alleged to have labelled the 'Picassoettes,' was of particular note. It looked at how Newland, Vergette and Margaret Hine were inspired by the ceramics of Pablo Picasso (as well as the experimental approach fostered by their tutor Dora Billington) and integrated their brightly coloured wares into decorative schemes in various coffee bars around London.¹²⁵ Providing a studio pottery lineage for decorative ceramics, it challenged the idea, which Fuller had forwarded, that Britton and her contemporaries had made a break with history, thus providing a sense of continuity.

Crafts Council exhibitions that featured ceramics in this period were, similarly, largely reflective. There was a Gillian Lowndes solo show in 1987, however, whilst it was titled *Gillian Lowndes: Ceramic Sculpture* and her referential, mixed media work moved far beyond studio pottery, there was little

124 Peter Dormer, *The New Ceramics: Trends and Traditions*, 2nd revised edition (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994), 194.

125 Tanya Harrod, "The Forgotten '50s."

controversy. Yet, there were a number of major shows about or featuring ceramics, such as the Arts Council-funded exhibitions *Vessel* (1987) at the Serpentine Gallery, London and *Out of Clay* (1988) at Manchester City Art Gallery, and *The Raw and the Cooked: New Work in Clay in Britain* (1993) at the Barbican, London and Modern Art Oxford. Rather than focusing purely on the work of trained ceramists, all of these exhibitions included fine artists' work in clay. This may indicate that concerns about divisions within 'ceramics,' had been superseded by concerns about its relationship to wider artistic use of clay. Certainly, ceramic historian Jo Dahn has argued that *The Raw and the Cooked*, which former *Crafts* editor Martina Margetts and Britton curated, was a key turning point for ceramic practice in Britain, as it embraced relativism.¹²⁶

5. Expansion?

Certainly, since the late '90s, the critical discourse around ceramics has gained a heightened sense of urgency, with the publication of surveys including De Waal's *20th Century Ceramics* (2003), Cigalle Hanaor's *Breaking the Mould: New Approaches to Ceramics* (2007) and Emmanuel Cooper's *Contemporary Ceramics* (2009), in addition to the launch of new journals such as *Ceramics: Art and Perception* (1990) and *Interpreting Ceramics* (2000). These publications address a broad range of work that includes ceramics, from studio pottery to installation and performance. They also feature works in clay by trained ceramists and what Garth Clark has labelled 'visitors': fine artists who use clay, such as Jeff Koons, Anthony Gormley and Rebecca Warren. However, whilst, as Hanaor, De Waal and Cooper admitted, this diversity made it difficult to categorise the works, they did not question the logic of using ceramics as a framework

126 Jo Dahn, "A Far Cry From Throwing a Pot," in *Parallax View*. Andrew Livingstone, ed. Tullie House Museum (Manchester: Cornerhouse Publications, 2011), 62.

through which to address the work and, instead, argued that it was 'expanding' or diversifying.¹²⁷

Applied to ceramics, the concept of 'the expanded field' has been used to describe a situation where the boundaries between different media are blurred and the opportunities for artists who work in clay are manifold. The term originates from Rosalind Krauss's seminal essay *Sculpture in the Expanded Field* (1979), which addressed the emergence of art practices, such as Land Art, that defied conventional classification.¹²⁸ Whilst commentators from Edward Lucie-Smith (1977) through to Dormer (1994) have acknowledged similar shifts in ceramic practice at earlier points, this analogy has gained traction since the turn of the millennium.¹²⁹ It might, therefore, be argued that ceramic practice had reached a similar crossroads to the one that sculpture found itself at in the 1970s.

Elaborating on the issue in *20th Century Ceramics*, De Waal stated: "Although ceramics now exist in a complex and expanded field, each generation has to feel the complexity and expansion of the field for themselves, turning away from the past, doubting the previous generation's abilities to renew the art of ceramics."¹³⁰ He then traced multiple alternative histories of ceramics, drawing on work in clay that was produced by fine artists, from Picasso's experimentation with pottery, which began in the 1940s to Andy Goldsworthy's raw clay walls (1991-present) as well as a broad range of studio pottery and more recent installations by trained ceramists Twomey and Piet Stockmans. He posited that ceramic literature has tended to focus on work that fits within pre-existing frameworks, perpetuating the idea that there is a dichotomy between ceramics and the art world: an issue that he clearly sought

127 Edmund De Waal, *20th Century Ceramics*, 214; Cigalle Hanaor, "Foreword," in *Breaking the Mould: New Approaches to Ceramics* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2007), n.p; Emmanuel Cooper, *Contemporary Ceramics*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 2009), 1.

128 Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," *October* 8 (Spring, 1979): 30-44.

129 Edward Lucie-Smith, "The Biddable Clay," *Ceramic Review*, no. 44 (1977) 6; Peter Dormer, *The New Ceramics: Trends and Traditions*, 2nd revised edition), 195.

130 Edmund De Waal, *20th Century Ceramics*, 214.

to challenge. Furthermore, in 2004, he co-curated the Tate Liverpool exhibition *A Secret History of Clay: From Gauguin to Gormley*, which sought to illustrate that clay had long been used in fine art practice, but argued that the resultant works had been marginalised within critical discourse.

Whilst *20th Century Ceramics* was chronological, *Breaking the Mould* included separate snapshots of the work of 61 different 'ceramic artists and makers,' which was split into seven loose categories, including 'Human Interest' and 'Ceramic Environments.' This focus on the individual and the thematic reinforced the idea that 'ceramics' was an objective category to be discussed rather than a multifarious area of practice and was akin to the curatorial and discursive approach taken by the Crafts Council in the previous two decades. The book was also prefaced by short essays: studio potter Natasha Daintry's "The Essential Vessel," Rob Barnard's "The Idea of the New" and Twomey's "Contemporary Clay," each of which focused on a different aspect of contemporary practice. Yet, Hanaor contended that the line between craft, art and design was becoming less distinct and focused on the opportunities that this opened up for artists 'trained in a specific medium.'¹³¹ Nonetheless, whilst she argued that many of the artists could have sat in several categories, the distance between some of the works, such as Barnard's wood fired pots and Keith Harrison's performative live firings, was vast. The same was true of Cooper's *Contemporary Ceramics*, which was equally ambiguous. Indeed, it might even be proposed that 'ceramics' itself served more as a theme than a critical framework.

The inclusive approach to ceramics was also accompanied by a new concern with aspects of ceramic practice that had been marginalised by craft discourse, in particular, industrial ceramics. Whilst the moral stance against the dehumanizing machinations of mass production was central to craft's identity in the twentieth century, as the economies of the developed world shifted from manufacturing to the service industries industrial ceramics gained new

131 Cigalle Hanaor, "Foreword," in *Breaking the Mould: New Approaches to Ceramics*, n.p

resonance. Although Glenys Barton's collaboration with Wedgwood during the 1970s, Janice Tchalenko's work with Dartington in the 1980s and Richard Slee's embrace of mass-market forms in the same period set important precedents, other ceramists only started to embrace industrial techniques and the readymade with gusto during the 1990s. Industrial ceramics might be seen to pass into the romanticised past, just as hand-making had before them. No longer a threat to the crafts, theorists and practitioners began to explore how they might be accommodated within that category. Michael Petry's publication *The Art of Not Making: The New Artist/Artisan Relationship* (2012) addresses the work of artists such as Twomey, who outsource the production of elements of their work. Others such as Neil Brownsword have also wielded craft skills and materials as semiotic tools and forwarded the idea that craft and industry need not mutually exclusive categories, whilst Paul Scott's book which combined technical, contextual and theoretical discussions of *Ceramics and Print* (1994) proved so popular that it was reprinted for a third time in 2012. Indeed, activity in this area has been so prominent that ceramic gallerist Mark Del Vecchio coined the term 'post-industrial ceramics' to describe it.¹³²

Relatedly, critical discourse around 'the crafts,' as a set of disciplines has also intensified since the turn of the millennium. Tanya Harrod's book *The Crafts in Britain in the Twentieth Century* (1999) provided a contextual history, which accommodated the marginal as well as the mainstream, but stressed the discontinuities of approach.¹³³ In *The Persistence of Craft* (2002) Greenhalgh argued that the crafts are a consortium of genres that were brought together through a series of complex forces, rather than a set of media: an assertion that threw the identity of ceramics into sharp focus.¹³⁴ Furthermore, in 1999, twenty-eight years after it was founded, the Crafts Council (formerly the CAC) became

132 Howard Risatti, *A Theory of Craft: Function and Aesthetic Expression* (California: UNC Press, 2009); Peter Dormer adopted a similarly protectionist viewpoint in *The Culture of Craft* (1997) contending that those interested in crafts should talk amongst themselves because no amount of criticism will change the status quo.

133 Tanya Harrod, *The Crafts in Britain in the Twentieth Century*.

134 Paul Greenhalgh, *The Persistence of Craft* (London: A & C Black, 2002), 1.

a client of the Arts Council and in 2006 it closed its gallery, instead focusing on its role in facilitating engagement with craft through other institutions

The twenty-first century has also seen the foregrounding of craft materials and processes in contemporary art, another issue that could have accelerated (or, alternatively, to have motivated) efforts to re-frame craft. Addressing this issue in her edited volume *Extra/Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art* (2011) Maria Elena Buszek postulates that both the art and craft worlds have a romanticized relationship with craft media, which has left contemporary artists, such as Ghada Amer and Twomey, who employ craft media with a conceptual focus in limbo.¹³⁵ As Buszek laments, figures such as Howard Risatti (2007) have responded to this identity crisis in the crafts by seizing on things that differentiate fine and applied arts.¹³⁶ This stance confines craft to a position of alterity, rather than embracing opportunities for dialogue. Buszek suggests this binarism was born from modernist art theory that policed divisions in the first place and which questions the automatic link between certain media and craft.

Drawing on Homi Bhabha's (1994) concept of hybridity, Jorunn Veiteberg (2005) has argued that craft can expose the artificial hermeticism of oppositional categories such as function/non function (and the exclusions they entail) by occupying a third space.¹³⁷ In a similar vein, in his *Thinking Through Craft* (2007), Adamson uses Derrida's notion of the 'parergon' to argue that craft has played a supplemental role in modern art: it is essential to the completion of an artwork, but something that must efface itself in order to do so effectively.¹³⁸ Like Veiteberg, he suggests that craft can draw upon that

135 Maria Elena Buszek, *Extra/Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2011); Maria Elena Buszek, *Craft and Contemporary Art*, Oxford Art Online, 2012, accessed August 14, 2012, <http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T2220516>. Whilst Twomey works almost exclusively in clay, Amer employs a variety of media, although she is perhaps best known for her stitched paintings.

136 Maria Elena Buszek, *Extra/Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art*, 3.

137 Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

138 Jacques Derrida and Craig Owens, 'The Parergon,' *October* 9 (Summer, 1979): 3-41.

supplemental nature in order to expose the impossibility of modern art's claims for autonomy. However, it also denied autonomy to the crafts. Whilst Greenhalgh simply exposed the fact that 'the crafts' are a set of materially bound and historically constituted disciplines, these theorists offered an alternative framing, which positioned craft as a verb: a way of doing. Nevertheless, Adamson cautioned: "this sense that craft is defined by its inferior status is, I think, crucial for understanding the 19th and 20th century, but for the 21st century, it's misleading."¹³⁹ To talk about hybridity, might, therefore, be regarded as a means of upholding its distinction as a 'space,' through which the value of certain aspects of craft practice – those that a host of institutions and individuals have a commitment to – can be maintained.

These theories offered an explanation for the use of craft process in fine art, but they also demanded new understandings of ceramic practice: if ceramics was no longer a 'craft,' then it needed to reframe itself along medium-based lines in order to retain its distinction from other forms of artistic practice. As Buchloh has observed, in the absence of physical means of distinction, institutional validation becomes central to a work's categorisation as art (or non-art).¹⁴⁰ Accordingly, the relationship between craft and museum practice also began to receive more critical attention in the literature on craft in the late 1990s, as well as through the previously-discussed rise of museum interventions produced by ceramists.¹⁴¹ For instance, Harrod highlighted the role that exhibition context plays in determining what is viewed as craft and

139 Andrea Gali, "What's Important About Craft? (Interview with Glenn Adamson)," *Norwegian Crafts*, no. 2 (2013), accessed December 2, 2013, <http://www.norwegiancrafts.no/magazine/02-2013/what-s-important-about-craft>.

140 Benjamin D. Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962 – 1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," *October* 55 (Winter, 1990): 105-143. Buchloh was discussing the effect that the gradual erosion of physical signs of authorship had on the categorisation of works.

141 The relationship with museum practice has also become a key concern for artists and theorists working in (and on) media that are traditionally associated with the crafts, particularly textiles. This is an issue that the AHRC-funded Context and Collaboration project (2006-7) addressed through a series of seminars and a (now closed) website. See: Lesley Millar, "Context and Collaboration," *Transition and Influence*, accessed May 5, 2014, <http://www.transitionandinfluence.squarespace.com/context-and-collaboration>.

Greenhalgh listed 'museology' and 'classification' amongst the key issues for the crafts over the previous thirty years. The latter may be unsurprising, given Greenhalgh formerly worked at the V&A, but it reflected the growing difficulty of separating the crafts from other areas of practice.

However, the efforts to fix 'ceramics' addressed in this chapter indicate that the categorisation of 'ceramics' (rather than studio pottery) has been contextual from the outset. As addressed above, when *Ceramic Review* was founded in 1970, there was a conflict between 'ceramic sculpture' and studio pottery; a year later, Rawson drew a broader picture of the integrative practice of ceramics, which moved beyond studio pottery, but excluded sculpture; by the early '80s, Dormer and Britton, still struggling to establish distinct criteria against which 'ceramics,' could be appraised, moved back to pottery, attempting to elevate its status and this was superseded by efforts to re-establish links to art. In her discussion of 'the expanded field,' Krauss suggested that critics and historians created a lineage for challenging work in order to render it manageable; this enabled them to discuss it as part of a historical continuum.¹⁴² Against this backdrop, de Waal's history-writing, the renewed interest in the industrial and the growth of works in which ceramists 'take the museum as medium' might be regarded as efforts to retrospectively establish a 'ceramics,' that can stand alone. Rather than expanding, the frame through which ceramic practice was viewed simply shifted.

Conclusion

Buszek has observed that:

Most writing on artists working in ['craft'] media not only tends to take for granted historical tendencies to associate them with a "craft culture" separate from fine art traditions but also proudly discusses and dissects this separation as a badge of honor (sic).¹⁴³

142 Rosalind Krauss, 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field,' 30-44.

143 Maria Elena Buszek, *Extra/Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art*, 8.

However, she also claimed “Galleries and museums do better by artists in their willingness and ability to spotlight work that falls between the cracks.”¹⁴⁴ Whilst craft-centred institutions have largely detached ceramic works from both historical and contemporary forms of practice that might bring their originality or the logic of the category ‘ceramics’ into question, museums are faced with the task of reconciling them with existing categories. They also began to collect and exhibit contemporary ceramics on a more regular basis in the 1970s, at the very point when ceramics was becoming institutionalised. If, as Bal has argued, ‘gestures of showing’ in museums can also highlight the cracks between objects and the statements made about them, then they might provide opportunities to question the logic of that separation.

As Eilean Hooper-Greenhill has contended: “words do more than merely name; words summon up associations, shape perceptions, indicate value and create desire.”¹⁴⁵ Accordingly, to employ the term ‘ceramics,’ without interrogating its relationship to the objects it addresses, or the ideologies that sustain it, can make this category and the exclusions it entails appear natural. By attending to the discrepancies between works that include ceramics and the various statements made about them through ‘gestures of showing,’ and other discursive formats we may be able to stop regarding ‘ceramics’ as an autonomous and objective category to be ‘expanded’ and re-think the discourses that conceal the pluralism of ceramic practice.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 8.

¹⁴⁵ Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and their Visitors* (London: Routledge, 1994), 118.

Chapter TWO: Shifting Institutional Landscape

The published literature and ‘gestures of showing’ addressed in the previous chapter reflect some of the key debates that have helped to construct ‘ceramics.’ However, the shifting ideologies that structure the wider socio-economic terrain have also helped to determine its constitution at particular moments. Furthermore, artistic practice, museum practice and academia have also become increasingly enmeshed in the period under discussion.¹⁴⁶ Consequently, any analysis of ceramic discourse must take these interdependencies into account.

This chapter is broadly chronological and addresses the contextual changes that have impacted on the artistic identities of ceramics practitioners and the opportunities accorded to them. It examines the emergence of certain identifiable tropes within education, political policy and museology and the privileging of certain values and approaches, such as ‘entrepreneurialism,’ ‘social inclusion’ and ‘impact.’ Instead of being regarded as a marker of historical progression, the appearance of such terms is approached as a prompt for investigation. As art historian Tom Holert has argued:

Associated with artistic practices, institutional environments and practitioners’ subjectivities, [such] terms gain the functionality of — Jakobsonian or Lacanian — shifters which inevitably inform and change the practices, environments and subjectivities attached to them.¹⁴⁷

An awareness of such ‘shifters’ can, therefore, help us to situate the ‘gestures’ of showing addressed in successive chapters within wider attempts to reshape society.

146 Mick Wilson and Paul O’ Neill, “Curatorial Counter Rhetorics and the Educational Turn,” *Journal of Visual Art Practice* 9, no. 3 (2010), 188.

147 Tom Holert, “Art in the Knowledge-based Polis,” *e-flux* 3 (2009), accessed May 19 2014, http://www.e-flux.com/journal/art-in-the-knowledge-based-polis/#_edn9

1. New order

The move away from pottery towards 'ceramics' was exacerbated by changes in the education system. Ceramics may now seem to be a fairly standard element of formal art and design education, albeit one that is (as addressed later in this chapter) currently under threat. However, innovation in 'the crafts' largely stood outside the government sanctioned art examination system in the early post-war period.¹⁴⁸ As late as 1973, less than ten percent of students at the art colleges and technical colleges and polytechnics, which formed the backbone of the art education system in Britain, were working towards advanced national qualifications.¹⁴⁹ Nevertheless, many of the ceramic practitioners who found fame then – and have done so since – are noted for their affiliation with particular educational establishments and those who taught in them.

Perhaps foremost amongst the famous pottery hubs was the internally-validated course at London's Central School, where Dora Billington and Gilbert Harding Green provided tuition alongside a Bauhaus-inspired Basic Design programme led by artists from a range of disciplines.¹⁵⁰ Encouraging students to take an experimental approach to medium, the programme shaped the works of the so-called 'Picassoettes,' in the 1950s and, later, others whose work also stood outside the dominant Anglo-Oriental aesthetic, including Baldwin, Duckworth, Lowndes and Ian Auld.¹⁵¹

However, whilst this influential combination of Basic Design and skills-based tuition combined craft and free-thinking, until 1963, the National

148 Tanya Harrod, *The Crafts in Britain in the Twentieth Century*, 232.

149 Clare Francis and David Warren Piper, "Some Figures about Art and Design Education," in David Warren Piper, ed. *Readings in Art & Design Education. 2. After Coldstream* (London: David Poynter, 1973), 26

150 The Central School was renamed The Central School of Art and Design in 1966.

151 The 'Picassoettes,' William Newland, Margaret Hine and Nicholas Vergette, have since become known for their brightly coloured tin-glazed earthenware. For a discussion of the origins of the term, see Jeffrey Jones, "In Search of the Picassoettes," *Interpreting Ceramics*, no. 1 (2000), accessed 24 October, 2011, [http://www.uwic.ac.uk/ICRC issue001/picasso.htm](http://www.uwic.ac.uk/ICRC%20issue001/picasso.htm).

Diploma in Design (NDD) was the main formal qualification that encompassed ceramic practice. It accepted students who had completed a two-year intermediate course in arts and crafts and allowed them to choose from thirty special subjects (alone or in combination), including pottery. Their progress was then evaluated in a practical examination.¹⁵² Nevertheless, change was afoot and the National Diploma in Art and Design (DipAD), which superseded the NDD, was divided into just four headings: Fine Art, Fashion and Textiles, Graphics and Three-Dimensional Design. Of course, ceramics could be accommodated within Fine Art and Three-Dimensional Design courses. Yet, there was no obvious place for pottery in its own right. Premised on the completion of a pre-diploma foundation course and the attainment of five 'O' level passes – three of which had to be 'academic' – the DipAD also excluded those whose practical skills were not matched by academic achievement. In addition to this, it included a substantial 'Liberal Studies' component (at least 15%), which centred on historical and theoretical learning. Encouraging critical and contextual thinking, this further exacerbated the existing division between vocational training, which focused on manual work, and the ceramics provision in higher education, which was becoming both art-oriented and more theoretical.

The introduction of the DipAD came at a point when countercultural sentiment and interdisciplinary approaches to medium were in ascension. Five years later in 1968, in what has become known as 'The Hornsey Affair,' a student protest about the use of Student Union funds at London's Hornsey College of Art turned into a six-week occupation, which became a hotbed of critical debate about art education and the social and political role of art and design. Discussions centred on the potential that a model of practice that sought to dispense with the divide between theory and practice.¹⁵³ Complaining that creative disciplines had become increasingly consolidated, attendees argued for

¹⁵² HMSO, *Report of the NACAE/NCDAD Joint Committee*. 1970. *The Structure of Art and Design Education* (London: HMSO, 1970).

¹⁵³ Tom Holert, "Art in the Knowledge-based Polis."

a networked, rather than linear approach to education: “The kind of flexible training in generalized, basic creative design that is needed to adapt to rapidly changing circumstances—be a *real* training for work, in fact.”¹⁵⁴ Holert has proposed that these debates, in combination with wider societal and conceptual shifts towards debate and accountability, heralded the beginnings of the concern with ‘research,’ and self-reflexivity in art and design education.¹⁵⁵ Nonetheless, the formalisation of art education was further bolstered when the DipAd was converted to BA status in 1974.

Writing in 1975, when he had just become head of the MA Ceramics programme at the Royal College of Art (RCA), overseeing the education of the students that emerged from this system, David Hamilton suggested that those working in craft media with fine art aspirations found themselves in a “no man’s land between design, the crafts and the fine arts” at this point.¹⁵⁶ For some, such as Hamilton’s colleague, The Marquess of Queensberry, who was Professor of Ceramics and Glass at the College, this was a significant issue: one that he partly attributed to the expressive focus of art foundation courses.¹⁵⁷ He claimed that ninety per-cent of applicants for the course proceeded from a fine art perspective, rendering it difficult for him to provide the design-led tuition that he felt may lead to more gainful employment for many of the students.¹⁵⁸ This assertion may be seen to indicate the issues that surround the teaching the mastery of a particular material, rather than focusing on its intended destination.¹⁵⁹

154 T.N., “Notes Towards the Definition of Anti-Culture,” in *The Hornsey Affair*, ed. Students and staff of Hornsey College of Art (Harmondsworth, London: Penguin, 1969), 116-7.

155 Tom Holert, “Art in the Knowledge-based Polis.”

156 David Hamilton, “No Man’s Land,” *Crafts*, no. 15 (1975): 42.

157 Marquess of Queensberry, “The Designer, The Craftsman and the Manufacturer,” *Journal of the Royal Society of the Arts* 124, no. 5234 (1976): 90. Art foundation courses were antecedents of the Bauhaus-inspired basic design course and continue to serve as the main entry route to BA Art and Design courses today.

158 *Ibid.*, 90.

159 This issue is addressed in more detail in the next chapter in relation to the writings of Gottfried Semper.

As more students began to produce works that were intended for gallery display, the issue of where to 'show' became more pressing. Two acts of exposition: Percy Peacock's MA presentation at the RCA, which was dominated by his large, raw surfaced clay-based sculptures, and a related exhibition of his work at Nottingham's Midland Group Gallery brought this issue into the spotlight. They led to *Craft into Art Goes* (1978) – a discussion day at the Midland Group Gallery, which took impact of "the focusing of free expression within previously functionally oriented disciplines" within art schools over the preceding fifteen years, as its main topic.¹⁶⁰ In his opening gambit, organiser Malcolm McIntyre Read echoed Hamilton, when he suggested that many of those working in this environment operated in a form of limbo; caught between the craftworld, which used a vocabulary that was inadequate for their needs, and the artworld, which held "the free thinking craftsman" in lower esteem than the artist.¹⁶¹ The formal structures of art schools, which "identified and then separated ceramics from fine art,"¹⁶² were seen to exacerbate this situation. However, by distinguishing those he discussed as craftspeople – albeit free thinking ones – from the artists, it might be argued that McIntyre Read upheld this separation. This may be seen to reflect his immersion in a system that had not yet moved beyond such categorical thinking.

Although these changes had minimal impact on the majority of ceramic practitioners, they were concurrent with the shifts in funding that led to the founding of the CAC. As addressed in the previous chapter, it catered to the 'artist craftsman,' and promoted work that departed from tradition. The CAC, therefore, provided a ready-made home for the work of critically aware ceramics graduates who were struggling to negotiate their place within existing institutions. However, mirroring the structures of art schools, it further separated ceramics from fine art. Whilst it offered financial support and

160 Malcolm McIntyre Read, "Introduction," in *Craft into Art Goes...a discussion*, ed. Midland Group Gallery (Nottingham: Midland Group Gallery, 1978) n.p.

161 Ibid.

162 Ibid.

exhibition opportunities for those students who found themselves in 'limbo,' it was a limbo of sorts in itself: providing a safe haven, it discouraged them from taking the leap and 'showing' their art-oriented ceramic works within art contexts.

Discussions about wider arts funding also manifested a concern with supporting contemporary practice. However, it was married to a growing emphasis on public engagement. This was exemplified by Jennie Lee's white paper *A Policy for the Arts* (1965), which set out plans to place the arts at the centre of daily life. In it, Lee, the Labour Party's Minister for the Arts, suggested that money should be used to improve engagement with the arts at all levels.¹⁶³ Her outlook was informed by moves to place responsibility for the health, cultural wellbeing and education of the nation in the hands of the government after the Second World War, which has led to the establishment of bodies such as the National Health Service (1946) and the Council of the Encouragement of the Music and Arts (1940), which later became the Arts Council of Great Britain and legislative changes, including the Education Act (1944).

This re-evaluation of the social role of the arts also had repercussions for museum practice. Speaking at the Museums Association conference in the same year, exhibition designer James Gardner proposed that museums were failing to communicate ideas as efficiently as international exhibitions, libraries and initiatives with the "common touch" did and thus risked being left behind in the fight for funding.¹⁶⁴ Similarly, in his *Reflections on the Future of Museums* (1971), Conservative minister Lord Eccles (who spearheaded the founding of the CAC) pronounced: "Only those who have faith in the power of the arts to heal, humanize and inspire society as a whole can convincingly argue for much larger sums of public money."¹⁶⁵ However, the country subsequently entered a period of high inflation and industrial action and by 1974, when entry fees for

163 Jennie Lee, *A Policy for the Arts. The First Steps* (London: HMSO, 1965).

164 James Gardner, "Communicating ideas," *Museums Journal* 65, no. 2 (1965): 131.

165 Rt. Hon. Viscount Eccles, "Reflections on the Future of Museums," *Museums Journal* 71, no. 2 (1971): 117.

national museums were briefly introduced, it became increasingly crucial for museums to justify their use of public funds at all.

Nonetheless, this dual focus on the contemporary and public engagement provided opportunities for 'gestures of showing,' that fused the two. Consequently, exhibitions and programmes that sought to interpret contemporary ceramics (many of which are addressed in successive chapters) became a more regular feature in museum programmes in the 1970s. Fostering an interest in the artistic applications of ceramic practice, encouraging self-criticality and innovation and providing exposition opportunities, these developments provided the conditions in which 'ceramics' would be framed as a distinct area of art practice.

2. Consumption and Accountability

By 1979, when the Conservative Party's Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister, the financial instability and social unrest of the preceding years showed no signs of abating. It is unsurprising; therefore, that The Arts Council began to place a firm emphasis on individual entrepreneurship, encouraging those in the arts to seek multiple sources of income, rather than depending on public funding. Furthermore, in 1981 they launched the Enterprise Allowance Scheme, which provided a guaranteed weekly income for unemployed people who set up their own businesses.¹⁶⁶ To a degree, these initiatives tallied with Crafts Council efforts to help makers to develop their own studio facilities. However, the Council's plans were also impacted by the change of government and, whilst, in 1983 the Crafts Council's Peter Longman suggested marketing stood outside of the Council's brief, as Tanya Harrod has observed, it too began to place a greater emphasis on market conditions in the 1980s.¹⁶⁷

166 HMSO, *Minutes of Evidence to the Education, Science and Arts Committee on the subject of private and public funding of the arts* (London: HMSO, 18 February 1981).

167 Peter Dormer, "Crafts Forum," *Crafts*, no. 52 (1981) 48; Tanya Harrod, *Factfile on the History of the Crafts Council*, 13. Other incentives, such as financial concessions for those who wished to

Although the CAC supported the BCC-run craft shop at the V&A, private shops and galleries remained the primary outlet for the work of ceramic practitioners. Perhaps in a reflection of the dual focus on exposition and sales within these outlets, when CAC Secretary Margrie had chaired a discussion on 'The Fine Art of Craft,' in 1979, which examined the overlap and conflicts between art and craft disciplines, issues around monetary value dominated the session.¹⁶⁸ Indeed, the growth of art-oriented practice had led many owners to adapt their spaces to accommodate one-off pieces, adopting the minimalist, aestheticizing approaches favoured by white cube art galleries.¹⁶⁹ Elevated above objects that were intended for use but available to purchase, individualistic craft objects were framed as luxury goods. The government, thus, moved to cultivate this high-end market and by 1988 it was able to boast: "the crafts are making a significant and increasing contribution to our national export drive," citing success at the 1987 New York Gift Fair as evidence.¹⁷⁰ A year later it provided the Crafts Council with £50,000 to create projects that would generate sales.¹⁷¹

Existing narratives about museum's role in promoting makers' works to the public operated in tandem with this entrepreneurial rhetoric. For example, when South East Arts formed a craft collection in conjunction with Hove Museum and Art Gallery in 1981, it was initially intended to be a means of promoting local makers. In a similar, but more explicitly commercial vein, Stoke-on-Trent's City Museum and Art Gallery held a series of exhibitions that

set up rural workshops, in particular, were, similarly, justified on economic grounds, premised on the hope that these developments would boost the rural economy. See Robert Banks MP, Chris Butler, Alan Howarth CBE, MP, John Last, Stuart Sexton, *The Arts. The Next Move Forward. A Plurality of Riches: A Plurality of Funding* (London: Conservative Political Centre, 1987).

168 Emmanuel Cooper, "The Fine Art of Craft," *Ceramic Review*, no. 56 (1979): 32. The seminar was convened by the Contemporary Art Society, whose collecting and distribution schemes formed the basis of many craft collections in regional museums.

169 Eileen Lewenstein and Emmanuel Cooper, "Set for Change," *Ceramic Review*, no. 81 (1983): 3.

170 Robert Banks MP et. al., *The Arts. The Next Move Forward. A Plurality of Riches: A Plurality of Funding*, 24.

171 Crafts Council, *Annual Report of the Crafts Council of Great Britain 1988-9* (London: Crafts Council, 1989).

combined selling and display during the early 1980s too.¹⁷² However, museums were under pressure to make savings and attract other forms of income.

The V&A museum's Boilerhouse gallery project was one of the most high-profile efforts to supplement government funding with other forms of income. Launched in 1980 and initially administered by the Conran Foundation, it hosted exhibitions on everything from *Art and Industry: The Products We Use* and *Sony Design* (1982) to *The Bag* (1985), which focused on carrier bags, and *Coke! Coca Cola 1886 – 1986* (1986). The partnership allowed the museum to attract visitors who were interested in contemporary design – then a popular subject – without assuming full responsibility for the material on display. Furthermore, the Foundation funded the renovation of the space. As V&A historian Christopher Wilk has noted, this arrangement was characteristic of its time:

Within the context of the Thatcher years, it represented a collaboration between a publicly funded institution and the private sector, which was to result in the Museum gaining a fully renovated exhibition space at no capital expense.¹⁷³

Perhaps buoyed by this, Sir Roy Strong heralded a move towards a “more consumer orientated V&A,” in his five-year plan for the museum in 1985.¹⁷⁴

The emphasis on consumption was also evident in other key exhibitions during this period; for example, the Crafts Council's touring exhibition *The New Spirit in Craft and Design* (1987), which showcased “what the tourists come to see and the Japanese to buy” and the Crafts Council-subsidised *Our Domestic Landscape: Your Home – Whose Choice?* (1986), which explored – amongst other things – the ways in which marketing might shape the decisions people make

172 Crafts, Listings (untitled), *Crafts*, no. 53 (1981): 16.

173 Christopher Wilk, “Collecting the Twentieth Century” in *A Grand Design. A History of the Victoria & Albert Museum*, ed. B. Richardson, accessed October 1, 2012, http://www.vam.ac.uk/vastatic/microsites/1159_grand_design/essay-collecting-the_new.html.

174 Victoria Daley, “Comment: Boom or Bust?” *Crafts*, no. 78 (1986): 12.

about interior design.¹⁷⁵ In addition to this, as Helen Myers has observed, the number of advertisements for retail-based galleries and outlets in *Crafts* magazine exploded in this period, as the yuppie fervour for interior design gathered pace.¹⁷⁶

The use of exhibitions as a means of shaping consumer taste in the 1980s and early '90s, had a more distinctly commercial flavour than earlier efforts in this vein wherein the desire to increase sales was tempered by pedagogical intent. For example, those which surrounded the Great Exhibition and the founding of the V&A in the latter part of the nineteenth century and the post-war activities of the Council of Industrial Design. Nevertheless, the Royal Charter that the Crafts Council received in 1982 also charged it with increasing public interest in and access to the crafts was enshrined and that same year it opened an extension to its existing gallery at Waterloo Place.

'Gestures of showing' were to form a major part of the Crafts Council's promotional toolkit in the 1980s and the gallery provided a forum where the public could engage with contemporary craft. The Council also attempted to increase exposure to contemporary craft through collections loans, touring exhibitions, such as those discussed above, and by encouraging critical discourse in *Crafts* magazine.¹⁷⁷ The Crafts Council Shop at the V&A might be seen to best embody the tensions of the time, offering displays of 'Gifts for Valentines' (1986) and Christmas gifts as well as producing a series of spotlight exhibitions, which showcased the work of individual makers including

175 Ralph Turner, "Preface," in *The New Spirit in Craft & Design*, ed. Crafts Council (London: Crafts Council, 1987), n.p.; Virginia Tandy, "Preface," in *Our Domestic Landscape. Your Home – Whose Choice?* eds. Ib Bellew, Peter Dormer, John Houston et. al (Manchester, Cornerhouse: 1986), 3.

176 Helen Myers, *How Does Crafts Magazine Represent the Lifestyle of the Craftsperson and is it for both the Craftsperson and the Lay Consumer?* (n.p., 1999).

177 In addition to commissioning articles, as addressed in the previous chapter, *Crafts* introduced a 'comments session' in 1981, in which interested parties could air their opinions on the crafts.

Poncelet (1981) in a more artistic light.¹⁷⁸ However, it also reflected the differing demands of the Council's broad constituency as highlighted in the 'The Fine Art of Craft.'

The Crafts Council concentrated on stimulating discussion about objects, for example, funding improved displays.¹⁷⁹ Yet, in the same period the rise of site-specific practice had led a number of museums to commission works that incorporated engagement into their structure. A number of these works, including the site-specific commissions at Stoke-on-Trent Museum addressed in chapter four, were commissioned as part of renewed efforts to redress the imbalance in arts funding between London and the regions. Proposed solutions to this issue were set out in the ten-year *Glory of the Garden* strategy, in which the Arts Council reflected on the failure of its founding aim of decentralising arts provision.

Launched in 1984 *Glory of the Garden* was part of a comprehensive review of the Arts Council's role, which aimed, amongst other things, to increase public-focused contemporary art activity in the English regions.¹⁸⁰ Funding supported traineeships in which budding curators were encouraged to focus on the presentation of contemporary art and also, to explore contemporary views of art, the Arts Council worked with the Regional Arts Associations (RAAs) and local authorities to 'seed' exhibition organisers in certain galleries.¹⁸¹ In addition to this, it collaborated with specific municipal galleries to encourage their active engagement with contemporary art. In the same period, museums were called

178 Crafts Council, *Twenty Five Years: Crafts Council Shop at the Victoria and Albert Museum* (London: Crafts Council and Victoria and Albert Museum, 1999); Crafts "Galleries," *Crafts*, no. 53 (1981): 17.

179 The Shipley Art Gallery, "The Shipley Gallery and the Eagle Collection," Shipley Gallery archive, about 1990.

180 Arts Council of Great Britain, *The Glory of the Garden. The Development of the Arts in England. A Strategy for a Decade* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1984), iv.

181 Arts Council England, *History of Arts Council England* (London: Arts Council England, 2004). Sara Selwood, *Towards Developing a Strategy for Contemporary Visual Arts Collections in the English Regions* (London: Sara Selwood Associates and Arts Council England, 2008), 4. The Regional Arts Associations were consortia comprised of a range of interested local parties, which were formed in order to help to develop local strategies and administer funding after the Arts Council closed its regional offices in 1966.

upon to provide evidence of their social value – often by providing performance indicators to the Office of Arts and Libraries or Audit Commission. This data was measured against service standards set out in the National Tourist Board’s guidelines on visitor attractions.¹⁸² Positioning the visitor as a customer, whose needs must be met in order to justify tax expenditure, this was in line with broader governmental rhetoric, such as Minister for the Arts, Richard Luce’s contention that the RAAs should regard themselves as “service industries.”¹⁸³

This dual impetus – to attract and ‘serve’ new visitors and to promote recent practice – often resulted in exhibitions and art commissions that married the contemporary to the local and site-specific. In Stoke-on-Trent, in particular, this led to the commission of a number of ceramics-centred installation works by non-ceramists, including Those Environmental Artists and Denys Blacker.¹⁸⁴ Indeed, art critic Andrew Graham Dixon regarded the well-received *Palaces of Culture* exhibition at Stoke-on-Trent City Museum and Art Gallery, which was produced by *Glory of the Garden* trainee Emma Dexter, and is discussed in detail elsewhere in this thesis, as a measurement of the scheme’s success.¹⁸⁵ Manchester City Art Gallery, which produced *Out of Clay* (1988) – an exhibition that, similarly, married the historical and contemporary and which is addressed in chapter six – also benefitted from *Glory of the Garden* funding.

The Crafts Council was subject to similar pressure to expand its geographical reach and the House of Commons Education, Science and Arts Committee encouraged them to work with local authorities and to develop

182 Museums and Galleries Commission, “Registration Scheme for Museums and Galleries in the United Kingdom,” in *Museum Provision and Professionalism*, 321.

183 Richard Luce, “Speech by the Art Minister Richard Luce to Council of Regional Arts Associations Conference,” Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 8 July 1987 (London: Council of Regional Arts Associations, 1987).

184 Those Environmental Artists are discussed in chapter four. For her residency at Stoke-on-Trent City Museum in 1986 Blacker used ten tons of clay to create a mould of her body, which she cast to make a wall-based sculpture. She also staged a performance, where she buried herself in the clay whilst wearing a costume made of fired ceramics. See Kath Gosling, “How Denys makes a Good Impression,” *Staffordshire Evening Sentinel*, December 1, 1986, 12.

185 Andrew Graham-Dixon, “A Museum of Mirrors,” *Independent*, September 25, 1987, n.p.

more regionally representative committees.¹⁸⁶ The strengthened position of the RAAs in the North East and South West, in particular, also benefitted the crafts. For example, Northern Arts funded the Cleveland Craft Centre's ceramic residency programme, whose first invitee was Takeshi Yasuda (1984), and provided money for The Shipley Art Gallery to commission new work for its collections.¹⁸⁷

Former Northern Arts Director, David Dougan, who became Director of the Crafts Council when Margrie retired in 1984, attempted to further devolve the organisation's work to the RAAs. For instance, he created craft officer posts in several regions and aimed to transform the organisation, with regional galleries taking ownership of the exhibition programme, producing and disseminating shows through a national network.¹⁸⁸ This may have created an alternative to the London-centric activities of the Crafts Council at that time. However, without the necessary financial means to support them, his far-reaching plans did not come to fruition and by 1988 he had been forced to resign.

This was not the end of the matter, as, in 1989, the government commissioned the outgoing head of the Office of Arts and Libraries, Richard Wilding, to produce a review of arts funding structures in England.¹⁸⁹ The resultant report *Supporting the Arts: A Review of the Structure of Arts Funding* led to the dissolution of the twelve Regional Arts Associations and creation of ten new Regional Arts Boards, which took on some of the Arts Council duties. However, more importantly for the purposes of this discussion, Wilding also recommended that the Crafts Council merge with the Arts Council. Causing

186 House of Commons Education, Science and Arts Committee, 8th Report, Session 1981-2. Public and Private Funding of the Arts (London: HMSO, 1982) ii 308.

187 David Briers, "Object Lessons," *Crafts*, no. 73 (1985): 35.

188 Although Dougan faced extensive criticism over his management of the Council's finances and failure to both attract new sources of income and find new gallery premises (see Tanya Harrod, "The Shows Must Go On," *The Spectator*, 27 August 1988, 30-33) his focus on sustainability and commitment to regionalism seem prescient in light of the organisation's subsequent path.

189 Richard Wilding, *Supporting the Arts. A Review of the Structure of Arts Funding* (London: Office of Arts and Libraries, 1989).

consternation amongst many of its constituents, this led to a passionate campaign to articulate the specific needs of craftspeople, with a focus on its hands-on support for practitioners.¹⁹⁰ Whilst this eventually led to plans to end the Crafts Council's independence being dropped, Luce suggested it review its corporate strategy to avoid duplication of effort across funding bodies.¹⁹¹ This might be seen to encourage further introspection and a reluctance to engage with the application of 'craft' media within other artistic frameworks.

Nonetheless, as 'the crafts' turned inwards, arguments about the economic benefit of the arts (rather than art objects) began to encroach on those about their independent, educational or wider societal value, encouraging an opening out. In his landmark report, *The Economic Importance of the Arts in Britain* (1988), John Myerscough outlined the ways in which spending on the arts led to further spending in other sectors and how it could enhance the profile of towns and cities.¹⁹² Moving beyond direct spending, this perspective was in line with a broader international growth in public arts projects, which were often married to regeneration efforts. Within this, artists were reconceived as active agents, producing locational identity. As art theorist Kerstin Mey observed:

To a great extent, these often centrally administered initiatives have been anchored in an instrumental logic: art in the expanded social field was employed to generate economic benefits through improved physical environments and to enhance social inclusion by using its potential to sustain, shape, and transform communal identity.¹⁹³

As such relational and situational practices became a dominant force in the artworld traditional institutions would be forced to reconsider their own

190 Tanya Harrod, *Factfile on the History of the Crafts Council*, 19.

191 Hansard Parliamentary Debates, 13 March 1990, column 156, accessed May 6, 2014, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198990/cmhansrd/1990-03-13/Debate-1.html>.

192 John Myerscough, *The Economic Importance of the Arts in Britain* (London: Policy Studies Institute, 1988)

193 Kerstin Mey, "Afterword: In | ter | ceptions and In | tensions – Situating Suzanne Lacy's Practice," in *Leaving Art: Writings on Performance, Politics, and Publics, 1974-2007*, ed. Suzanne Lacy (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2010), 327–338.

capacity to support contemporary practice, both physically and ideologically. These shifts also provided opportunities for artists to transcend the strictures of existing support networks and work collaboratively not only across artistic disciplines, but also beyond them. However, whilst they would eventually have great impact on both the museum sector and ceramic practice, as the 1980s drew to a close 'the crafts' were seeking to regroup after the threat posed by the Wilding Report and the concerns of the museums were also more pragmatic.

Throughout the decade, museum practice had become further professionalised, with the government expanding the Museums and Galleries Commission's duties to include the production of best practice guidance. As the Commission acknowledged: "It is no longer good enough for museums just to be well run. They now have to be seen to be well run."¹⁹⁴ The Museum Registration scheme (now known as Accreditation), launched in 1988, was at the heart of these developments. It provided a framework against which museums could measure their professional standards and on which funders could base their decisions: something that the Museum Documentation Association (MDA) data standard, which was launched in 1991 would enlarge upon¹⁹⁵ Requiring each institution to produce an updated acquisition and disposal policy every five years, the data standard compelled museums to concentrate their energies on particular areas of collecting. Cautioning against collecting the same types of material as other institutions, it prevented duplication and limited competition to buy, which might drive prices up, shaping the market and raising expenditure of public money. Whilst it was flexible enough to allow museums to realign their priorities in the face of change, it may have further reinforced disciplinary boundaries. However, it also led to a renewed interest in interpreting under-used collections: something

¹⁹⁴ Museums and Galleries Commission, "Setting Standards for Museums," in *Museum Provision and Professionalism*, 307-310.

¹⁹⁵ It also provided a safeguard against the sale or disposal of museum collections in a time of recession. Documentary evidence that an object was donated to a museum with the intention that they safeguard it for future generations or purchased with public funds to the same end made it more difficult to make an ethical argument for their sale.

that was to provide opportunities for a broad range of artists – including those working with ceramics – in the ensuing decades.

3. Engagement and Context

As they entered the 1990s, ceramic practitioners, again, found themselves navigating institutional divisions. Whilst the first National Curriculum (1988) had seen craft practices largely effaced from Design Technology programmes, they had a clear place in the 1992 curriculum for art, bringing school provision closer to that of further and higher education.¹⁹⁶ In the museum world, the opening of the V&A's fixed twentieth-century exhibition galleries the same year and the establishment of the Design Museum in 1989 also separated recent applied design from art-oriented ceramic practice. Nevertheless, the decision not to implement Wilding's recommendation that the Arts and Crafts Councils merge had, once more, raised the spectre of distinction. Initial responses to this, which included a suggestion that the crafts be redefined as "appropriate workmanship allied with appropriate design,"¹⁹⁷ appeared to evidence official acknowledgement of the craft-design relationship that had gained traction during the previous decade. However, feedback on the Wilding Report also led to concerted efforts to establish critical discourse around craft, leading to an increased concern with context.

The critical position of ceramics and 'the crafts' remained a constant concern for practitioners in these uncertain times. As Amanda Game noted in her report on the 1989 seminar *Clay Questions*, some felt that public understanding of ceramics tradition and properties would help.¹⁹⁸ When Crafts Council finally opened its new gallery at Pentonville Road in 1991, it seized the

196 Dennis Lawton, Clive Chitty and Richard Aldridge, eds. *The National Curriculum*. (London: Institute of Education, University of London, 1988); The National Curriculum Council, *Art in the National Curriculum* (York: National Curriculum Council, 1992).

197 Tony Ford, "Revision of the Corporate Plan September 1990," CC (90) 4/3, Crafts Council archive.

198 Amanda Game, "Second Class Clay?" *Crafts*, no. 96 (1989): 18-19

opportunity to move away from individuals object and one-man shows and address these concerns. As discussed in the previous chapter, exhibitions produced to this end tended to be thematic, often providing a historical overview. They included *Out of the Frame: Contemporary and Historical Embroidery and Stitch* (1992); *Furniture Today: Its Design and Craft* (1995) and *Under Construction: Exploring Process in Contemporary Textiles*.

However, *Clay Questions* attendees also argued for attention to the contexts of the frameworks within which ceramists worked: an approach that would gain traction as the decade progressed and which another exhibition – *Objects of Our Time* (1996) – highlighted the importance of.¹⁹⁹ Aiming to celebrate the cross-fertilization between art, craft and design practice, it was accompanied by a catalogue in which Margetts referenced Gormley's *Field* installations, which incorporated handmade clay figures, and Richard Wentworth's use of readymade ceramic objects, as well as addressing the fact that most exhibitors had art school training. Yet, as the catalogue gestured to the pluralism and the dialogic nature of contemporary practice, the exhibition itself focused on designers and those with a pre-existing link to 'the crafts,' limiting the opportunities to truly illustrate her thesis.²⁰⁰ With Crafts Council Director Tony Ford using the same platform to argue that: "The infrastructure for the crafts needs building up – dedicated galleries, major collections, specialist staffing..."²⁰¹ it thus represented the tension between the urge to consolidate and the growing concern with interdisciplinarity at that point.

Shifts in academia were to further complicate this matter, providing a greater impetus for introspection. In 1992, polytechnics, which awarded the majority of arts degrees, gained university status: a change that made them eligible to participate in the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE). Launched by the University Grants Committee in 1986, the Exercise aimed to gauge the quality of research within UK universities, with the results aiding decisions

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Martina Margetts, *Objects of our Time* (London: Crafts Council, 1996), 5-19.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 5-6.

about the allocation of funding. Until this point, much of the critical debate around contemporary art practice had taken place outside of academia: something that may be attributed to the distribution of funding within arts colleges at the time, which was focused on teaching.²⁰² The efforts of *Crafts* magazine before this point may, therefore, be viewed as a move to establish a critical network that was similar to, but separate from, that which sustained and policed the limits of the fine art field.

Although arts courses received a small proportion of funding after the 1992 exercise, which was largely based on the number of publications per department, ahead of the 1996 exercise HEFCE produced a definition of research that included:

work of direct relevance to the needs of commerce and industry, as well as to the public and voluntary sectors; scholarship, the invention and generation of ideas, images, performances and artefacts including design, where these lead to new or substantially improved insights; and the use of existing knowledge in experimental development to produce new or substantially improved materials, devices, products and processes, including design and construction.²⁰³

The output-based measurement scheme that accompanied this, demanded the works' national and international significance within 'relevant industries.' However, although the first practice-based PhDs were launched in this context and submissions could include artworks, of the other listed suggestions, publications and exhibitions, in particular, offered more quantifiable means through which those working in an art-oriented manner could evidence significance. The RAE, thus, created an impetus for writing that contextualized the resultant work. It also made partnership working with museums, galleries and funders, who were public facing and could help them

202 Michael Jubb, "The AHRB," in *Research and the Artist – Reconsidering the Role of the Art School*, eds. Marjorie Allthorpe-Guyton and Antonia Payne (Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Art, University of Oxford), 96. Those who founded the Arts and Humanities Research Board in 1998, claimed this limited research culture in the arts at the time

203 Joint Funding Councils of the United Kingdom, "1996 Research Assessment Exercise: The Outcome: Annex A. Definition of Research," Research Assessment Exercise, accessed May 6, 2015, http://www.rae.ac.uk/1996/c1_96.html#annexa.

to collate supporting data, more attractive. This was to lead to a growing concern with how 'gestures of showing' could be used to evidence research and 'insight.'

The entry of the arts into the RAE was followed, in 1998, by the establishment of the Arts and Humanities Research Board (AHRB, now the Arts and Humanities Research Council or AHRC). Set up in response to the recommendations set out in the first Dearing Report into Higher Education (1997) it made project funding available to arts departments for the first time.²⁰⁴ Initially, there was no provision for practice-based arts within the three main strands: Museums and Galleries; Postgraduate and Research, and there was some debate about whether there should be.

Some of the participants in the *Research and the Artist* conference at the University of Oxford's Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Art in 1999 expressed concerns about whether assessment frameworks developed in relation to science subjects could be transferred to art practice. Art Historian Charles Harrison and others, including Patricia Bickers, also suggested that the emphasis on measurable outcomes within other funding systems, particularly the RAE, was incompatible with the way in which many artist projects evolved through practice.²⁰⁵ Responding to this, the AHRB's Michael Jubb contended that his organisation was different and would focus on the setting of research questions, the identification of a methodology through which to address them and 'rigorous objective setting,' rather than assessing outcomes.²⁰⁶ Nevertheless, the research programme, which encompassed fellowships, research leave and a range of grants, was dependent on peer review: something that Harrison had earlier argued might reinforce the preferences of the dominant forces within the

204 Michael Jubb, "The AHRB," in *Research and the Artist – Reconsidering the Role of the Art School*, 96-100.

205 Patricia Bickers, "The Curse of the Academe," in *Research and the Artist – Reconsidering the Role of the Art School*, 50-57.

206 Michael Jubb, "The AHRB," in *Research and the Artist – Reconsidering the Role of the Art School*, 96-100.

field.²⁰⁷ It might, therefore, also lead those writing bids to structure them in ways that conformed to the positions of those who would assess them. In ceramics, where the pool of assessors was small and where critical debate was, as previously discussed, inward looking, this held the potential for further medium-based entrenchment.

Indeed, the same period saw the launch of a number of fellowship schemes, which supported critical study of the applied arts, crafts and design. Amongst other examples, they provided the financial security for Peter Dormer to produce his book *The Culture of Craft: Status and Future* (University of East Anglia, 1995); Tanya Harrod to organise the conference *Obscure Objects of Desire? Reviewing Crafts in the 20th Century* (University of East Anglia, 1997) and Julian Stair to organise the conference and publication *The Body Politic: The Role of the Body and Contemporary Craft* (Northumbria University, 1999). These initiatives provided opportunities for universities, Regional Arts Boards and the Crafts Council to combine their resources to achieve the shared aim of improving research into and recognition of these subjects. For example; The Crafts Council and Eastern Arts Board funded the University of East Anglia's fellowship scheme, whilst the Crafts Council and Northern Arts funded that of the University of Northumbria. The rewards for each – outputs for the RAE and research funding for the universities; the much-argued for critical context for the Crafts Council and raised regional profile for the Arts Associations were clear.

Other fora reflected a similar concern with theorizing the crafts: The *Untangling the Threads* symposium (1996) – hosted by Nottingham's Angel Row and Djanogly Art Galleries – explored their confused identity; in 1997 Camden Arts Centre hosted a series of seminars titled *Reinventing Crafts. The Concept of Craft in the Later Twentieth Century*, which considered themes of identity, language and gender; whilst *Dangerous Liaisons: The Relationship Between Art and*

207 Charles Harrison, "When Management Speaks," in *Research and the Artist – Reconsidering the Role of the Art School*, 58-67.

Craft (1999) looked at 'crossover practice.'²⁰⁸ These schemes brought welcome financial support and encouraged more critical and interdisciplinary thinking. However, like the idea-first impetus of the AHRB's approach, they privileged the discursive, at the expense of 'learning through making' – a subject that the Crafts Council had published a report on the year before.²⁰⁹ They thus began to mirror the dialogue-centred events that dominated fine art.

In a culture (and funding network) dominated by words and persona, many of the people involved in these events, including De Waal, Stair, Perry and Janis Jeffries quickly gained high profiles. Their rise was particularly swift in craft and ceramics circles, where there was a growing fervour for texts that might help practitioners to position their work. They were also particularly well placed to capitalise on a burgeoning interest in commissioned 'interventions' into museum collections and heritage spaces. Exploring the narrative potential of site-specific practice and object histories, they were to become pivotal to discussions about expanded ceramic practice in the ensuing decade.

The climate that was to produce these opportunities was closely tied to the shifting research culture within British museums. The rise of the 'New Museology,' which attempted to divest museums of their air of exclusivity and authority and favoured multiple narratives, had led to a rebalancing of curatorial skills.²¹⁰ Those emerging with museum studies qualifications, which were becoming increasingly prevalent, thus had a broader base of skills, exploring interpretation, education and public engagement as well as object appraisal and administration. Along with budget cuts, these changes had led to a restructure at the V&A, whereby a number of specialist posts were axed and a specific research department, which curators could be seconded into, was formed. This diversification of the curator's role was a source of anxiety for

208 Crafts Council, "*Dangerous Liaisons: The Relationship Between Art and Craft* [advertisement]," *Crafts*, no. 157 (1999): 81.

209 Crafts Council, *Learning Through Making: A National Enquiry into the Value of Creative Practical Education in Britain* (London: Crafts Council, 1988).

210 Gaynor Kavanagh, "Introduction," in *Museum Provision and Professionalism*, 1-12.

some and celebration for others: a situation that Gaynor Kavanagh's anthology *Museum Provision and Professionalism*, which was originally published in 1994, captured perfectly. Setting out the different skills that might be required in the sector at the time, Kavanagh suggested, "the inclusive nature of the concept of the museum professional in the long run has to be more useful and productive than the narrower and exclusive concept of the museum curator."²¹¹

By contrast, some papers, including one by an anonymous specialist curator, who discussed recent changes at the V&A and defended the separation of "curator-expert, with numerous publications to their credit," claimed that dilution or marginalisation of the curatorial role would lead to the dumbing down of exhibitions and poor utilisation of collections.²¹² However, whilst it is undoubtedly true that identification and research are pivotal parts of the curatorial role, which can enhance interpretation, the realignment of priorities also provided a climate that was more amenable to intradisciplinary thinking.²¹³ It, therefore, provided scope to explore alternative approaches to ceramic practice, just as new support mechanisms offered the critical – and physical – spaces in which to do so.

The largest of these mechanisms was the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). Launched in 1994, it initially focused on capital projects – an area of support not covered by existing Arts Council provision.²¹⁴ This led to a wave of construction, which reshaped the face of the British Museum sector. Projects that benefitted from this funding include Manchester Art Gallery (1997), the British galleries at the V&A (1998), Worcester City Museum and Art Gallery (1995), National Museums of Scotland (1997) which created new galleries

²¹¹ Ibid., 7.

²¹² Anonymous, "Unnatural Selection," in *Museum Provision and Professionalism* 2nd edition, 139-40. Originally published 1993.

²¹³ It might be argued that in regional museums, which had far less staff, many curators had always performed a more rounded role.

²¹⁴ The Heritage Lottery Fund worked on a principle of 'additionality,' – funding only work that was not covered by existing tax-funded streams. However, it also funded a large number of historic acquisitions.

dedicated to the interpretation of the decorative arts and crafts.²¹⁵ In addition to this, other sites, such as Kildonan Museum (1996), Spike Island (1995) Nottingham Castle Museum (1996) and Glasgow Museums (1997) also used the funding to construct studio and education spaces or fund residencies. However, none of these included ceramic studio facilities: a fact that shaped the types of works that ceramists could create within them.²¹⁶ This funding made room for collections development and provided spaces in which new approaches to display, interpretation and investigation could take place. However, it favoured works that could be made on-site, such as raw clay works, or the installation of pre-made components over traditional studio ceramic production, which demanded the use of kiln facilities.

In addition to this, the HLF funded a number of commissions, many of which were for works that were integral to the museum's physical environment or had an explicit public or interpretative role. These included furniture and tiling for Glasgow's Gallery of Modern Art (1995), "public art and craft commissions," for Barrow's Dock Museum (1996), "Exterior and interior urban art commission," at the Pump House People's History Museum in Manchester (1997). There was also a substantial, quarter of a million pound investment in a craft development project at Calderdale Museums and Arts (1997), which was administered through the *Arts 4 Everyone* scheme, and led – amongst other things – to a three-year craft development project at Bankfield Museum, which sought to develop works involving "artists with a personal connection to the museum."²¹⁷

Site-specific approaches gained further momentum in 1997 when the 'New Labour' government came to power. However, it was 1999 that truly marked a turning point for ceramic practitioners. That year the Crafts Council

215 Although including contemporary works, these projects largely focused on the redisplay of historic artefacts and are not discussed in the body of the thesis.

216 Heritage Lottery Fund, "Project Search," Heritage Lottery Fund, accessed May 6, 2015, <http://www.hlf.org.uk/our-projects/search-our-projects>.

217 Ibid; Liz Hoggard, "Bankfield Museum," *Crafts*, no. 174 (2002): 17-18.

became a client of Arts Council England, De Waal produced the intervention *Modern Home at High Cross House* and the V&A launched its Contemporary Programme, which offered a forum for performative and dialogic practice. As the official relationship between art and craft became less dichotomous and the nascent funding streams discussed above offered opportunities for ceramists to exhibit in new contexts, the turn of the millennium thus marked a paradigm shift in ceramic practice.

4. Dialogue and impact

As set out in Culture Minister Chris Smith's 1998 publication *Creative Britain*, the New Labour government's arts policies centred on "access, excellence, education, and economic value."²¹⁸ Of course, the twin – and rather hazily defined – goals of access and excellence had been at the core of arts policy in Britain since the inception of the Arts Council and had also informed Crafts Council policy.²¹⁹ However, Smith's text reflected the Labour Party's wider policies, particularly its approach to social exclusion. Shortly after they came to power in 1997, they had set up a Social Exclusion Unit (later the Social Exclusion Task Force), which aimed to address the symptoms and causes of social exclusion. Central to their mission was the belief that "the individual citizen achieves his or her true potential within the context of a strong community."²²⁰

Museums were also called upon to act as agents of social inclusion, as well as to prove their social value. In a statement V&A Director Alan Borg made in 1998, he employed similar buzzwords to Smith, expounding:

218 Chris Smith, "Introduction," in *Creative Britain* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), 2-3.

219 Janet Minihan, *The Nationalization of Culture. The Development of State Subsidies to the Arts in Great Britain* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1977); Jennie Lee, *A Policy for the Arts. The First Steps*, 6.

220 Chris Smith, "A Vision for the Arts," in *Creative Britain*, 42.

If there is one word which covers all our activities, it ought to be excellence – in design and in the collections, in their display, in our scholarship and in the service we offer to visitors.²²¹

Such narratives were rapidly embedded in museum policy, particularly in local authorities, where the objectives of corporate plans shaped those of museums. For instance, the 2001 *Renaissance in the Regions* report, in which Re: Source (the Council for Museums, Libraries and Archives) proposed a new structure, which would help these museums “to make a full contribution to meeting local, regional and national policy goals,” was peppered with deliverables; in particular, the notion that museums could “contribute to economic regeneration in the regions,” and “promote access and inclusion.”²²²

As museologist Richard Sandell has observed, whilst there was extensive academic debate about the social and political aspects of this paradigm shift, there was little indication of how – or indeed why – museums should orient themselves in relation to these new demands.²²³ Efforts in this area included partnership work with specific groups and organisations such as care homes and youth-centred initiatives, which often centred on ‘outreach’ activities beyond the museum. However, within the museums’ walls, practices that critiqued and exposed the institutional biases of museums proliferated. Seeking to provide alternative interpretations of museum collections and processes, museums invited people from amongst these underrepresented groups to offer their perspectives, incorporating them into displays. Aiming to disrupt institutional narratives, which reinforced dominant cultural perspectives that normalized exclusion, it was hoped that by seeing their heritage represented within the museum, people would feel more fully embedded in society and, therefore, invested in making positive changes within it.

221 Alan Borg, Alan Borg, “Editorial: a new name for the Museum?” *V&A Magazine*, Sept–Dec (1998): 1.

222 re: source, *Renaissance in the Regions: a New Vision for England’s Museums* (London: re: source, 2001).

223 Richard Sandell, “Museums as Agents of Social Inclusion,” *Museum Management and Curatorship* 17, no. 4 (1998): 401.

Sandell has observed that relational issues – according people a sense of place within society – have been central to critical debate on social inclusion.²²⁴ The relational had also become a key concern within contemporary art during the preceding decade, as delineated in curator Nicolas Bourriaud's book *L'Esthétique Relationnelle* (1998).²²⁵ Bourriaud discussed how works by artists such as Rikrit Tiravanija and Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, which attempted to create temporary communities through participation, might create alternative spaces based on shared experience.²²⁶ Certainly, Grant Kester has suggested that, under New Labour, artists were endowed with the ability to help them to do this, transforming marginalized individuals into productive citizens, by creating spaces in which they could express their autonomy.²²⁷ Nevertheless, the communities created by those artists bore little resemblance to the diverse, but cohesive structures that the government described. Instead, the participatory works that began to appear in museums tended to fuse active engagement and reinterpretation, with a more obvious focus on representation.

The Arts Council had begun to re-evaluate its relationship with individual artists by the early 2000s, proposing: "the artist is the 'life source' of our work. In the past, we have mainly funded institutions. Now we want to give higher priority to the artist."²²⁸ Such works, might, therefore, be regarded as an obvious way in which museums to capitalize upon the funding available for artist-centred projects, whilst 'showing' inclusivity. Many of the projects that flourished in this context, from individual commissions like De Waal's *Modern Home*, to wider commission-based programmes including *Museummaker* (2005-2011); the *New Expressions* series (2008-present); *Trust New Art* (2009-

224 Richard Sandell, "Museums as Agents of Social Inclusion," *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 17, no. 4 (1998): 404-5.

225 Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. (Dijon: Le Presse Dr Reel, 2002). Original published 1998.

226 Ibid., 14.

227 Grant Kester, "Who's Your Daddy?" in *Gallery and Community: Art, Education, Politics*, ed. Marijke Steedman (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2012), 14.

228 Arts Council England, *Ambitions for the Arts: 2003–2006* (London: Arts Council England, 2003).

present) and the V&A's Contemporary programme (1999-present) are discussed later in this thesis. Within such frameworks, which celebrated the dialogic and situational nature of creative activity, craft and medium were just two possible perspectives through which to approach works that incorporated clay. Bringing ceramic practice into display spaces within which it was viewed by a broader section of the public, they also decentralized its reception, and therefore challenged the logic of 'ceramics' as a category of art. However, they favoured installation and site-specific practices and it is likely that this has contributed to the raised profile (and, perhaps, the growing number) of ceramics-based works that fit into these categories.

As these governmental changes were taking place, the Crafts Council had been busy trying to find a new gallery space and, after a period of uncertainty, re-opened in 1999. The gallery went on to host prizes for Furniture (1999) Ceramics (2001) and Textiles (2002), which were awarded in partnership with the Jerwood charitable trust.²²⁹ It also produced a series of three-person exhibitions, others on architecture and design, thematic shows on issues such as *Decadence* (1999) *(Un)Limited: Repetition and Change in International Contemporary Craft* (1999), which is discussed later in this thesis and *Approaching Content* (2003), which included Twomey's *Consciousness/ Conscience*. Whilst the Jerwood prize, somewhat curiously, sustained the separation of particular media, these other exhibitions addressed the growing attention paid to reception and context within craft practice and heralded a move away from 'the crafts,' to craft process.

Within this climate, it was perhaps, no coincidence that the 2002 conference *From Material Things: Art and Artefact in the 21st century*, in which the Arts Council of England aimed "to celebrate its new relationship with craft and design," was held at the British Museum.²³⁰ At first glance the emphasis on the "interweaving of distinct languages," in the accompanying publicity material

229 There were earlier Jerwood prizes. However, they were held in different galleries.

230 The Arts Council of England, "International Conference. From Material Things: Artifact in the 21st century [advertisement]," *Crafts*, no. 174 (2002): 6.

might assuage concerns about the loss of distinction for the crafts and design – something that reporter Kate McIntyre claimed it failed to do.²³¹ However, as Bal has argued, the multimedial nature of museums makes them ideal places for those who wish to challenge boundaries between medium-based categories.²³² Indeed, the term ‘languages,’ and the use of the word craft again suggested a focus on communicative practice – as in Adamson’s notion of ‘craft as a verb.’²³³ This subtle shift in terminology opened the door to a view of practice, which pivoted on “the common ground between design, craft and art as material expressions.”²³⁴ This may have rendered the Craft Council’s transition from separate body to Arts Council client in 1999 appear logical, however, by focusing on reception, it also side-lined the specific practical needs of those who wished to develop a more in-depth technical and processual command of their materials. This caused much consternation within the Crafts Council and contributed to the resignation of its Chairman, Nicholas Goodison, and Director, Louise Taylor, in 2006.

The same year, the Crafts Council gallery was closed and the organisation began to develop an exhibition programme that was based on partnerships and touring, re-positioning itself as facilitator and service provider, rather than a paternalistic body. In 2007 it launched *Out of the Ordinary: Spectacular Craft* - the first in a series of three triennial exhibitions produced in partnership with, and held at, the V&A. Exploring how craftsmanship formed a core concern for eight artists who worked in a range of media from lace to dust, Harrod proposed:

Here was a craft show with apparently no place for the craft constituency. A rubicon had been crossed. Henceforth exhibitions of

231 Kate McIntyre, *The Object of the Exercise? Crafts*, no. 176 (2002): 6.

232 Mieke Bal, *Double Exposures: The Subject of Cultural Analysis*, 3

233 Glenn Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft*.

234 Linda Sandino, “Here Today, Gone Tomorrow. Transient Materiality in Contemporary Cultural Artefacts,” *Journal of Design History* 17, no. 3 (2004): 283.

discrete objects chosen from the full range of craft genres would be difficult to curate.²³⁵

The Crafts Council's new position was also marked by the closure of its shop at the V&A a year earlier. Instead, it launched *Collect* – a selling fair that offered stands devoted to the individual commercial galleries that still formed the main outlet for contemporary practice. Adopting a similar format to the high-end art fairs such as Frieze, it was initially held at the V&A, but later transferred to the Saatchi gallery: a move that might be seen to signal its aspirations and those of the Arts Council. Like Frieze, it also included a project space and a programme of talks and discussions, which served to both contextualise and promote the works, their makers and the gallerists who represented them. Thus, the machinations of the artworld and the crafts became further aligned.

As ceramics lost its central position within the remit of the Crafts Council – an association that had helped to separate art-oriented ceramic practice from other forms of artistic endeavour – it was undergoing a similar identity crisis within universities. In the 2000s the closure of materials-based undergraduate courses within UK universities became the subject of heated debate. Articles on the subject include Ellie Herring's *RIP Ceramic Design Education in Scotland* (2008); Harrod's 'A Crisis in the Making' (2009); Matthew Partington's 'Can British Ceramics Education Survive?' (2010) and Lauren Hadley's "'The Trouble with Clay is That You Can't Store it on a Memory Stick' – A Consideration of Ceramics in Higher Education in Britain" (2013).²³⁶

235 Alison Britton and Simon Olding, eds. *Three by One: A Selection from Three Public Craft Collections* (London: Crafts Council, 2009), 27.

236 Ellie Herring, "RIP Ceramic Design Education in Scotland," *Crafts*, no. 212 (2008), 14; Tanya Harrod "A Crisis in the Making," *Crafts*, no. 219 (2009), 104; Matthew Partington "Can British Ceramics Education Survive?" *NCECA Journal* (2010), 104-5; Lauren Hadley, "'The Trouble with Clay is That You Can't Store it on a Memory Stick' – A Consideration of Ceramics in Higher Education in Britain," *Interpreting Ceramics*, no. 15 (2013) accessed April 2, 2014, <http://www.interpretingceramics.com/issue015/articles/04.htm>.

As Partington observed, in the ten-year period to 2010, the number of ceramics courses in the UK had dropped from seventeen to four. He largely attributed these closures to two factors: the cost implications of technical facilities, support and studio teaching and falling student numbers. However, in addition to outright closures, many single medium courses were merged with others, for example, Ceramics and Glass (Sunderland), Applied Arts (Wolverhampton) or 3D design (Staffordshire). Partington's research also indicated that the lack of ceramics programming in schools was a contributory factor.

The marginalisation of arts subjects was further exacerbated by government initiatives to enhance the UK's performance in the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) subjects. Bringing ambassadors from these industries into schools through initiatives such as STEMNET, which was launched in 2003, placed an emphasis on the employability of graduates in STEM subjects and thus, the value of their degrees. Similarly, the English Baccalaureate (EBacc): a performance indicator, which some British schools adopted in 2012, ranks schools according to their students' GCSE passes in English, Mathematics, History or Geography, the sciences and a language, effacing arts subjects entirely.

The Crafts Council attempted to tackle this decline in a number of ways. Their *Firing Up* scheme, launched in 2010, attempted to remedy it, reactivating kilns in secondary schools and offering training to give teachers the confidence to operate them. It hoped that cultivating interest in ceramic practice at school age would lead to an increase in student demand for ceramics courses at university level.²³⁷ In the same year they also launched the Craft Action Network (CAN) website, a network for those with interest and involvement in contemporary craft education and training. The official manifesto claimed:

In the light of numerous high-profile H.E. craft course closures, there is a clear need for new approaches to teaching and learning of craft in order

237 Duncan Hooson, "Full Circle," *Journal of Modern Craft* 7, no. 1 (2014): 72.

to engage young people in craft from the early stages of their educational pathways, and promote craft and creative industries as a potential career or study route.²³⁸

Harrod argued for a coordinated national strategy to tackle the issue of course closures, suggesting that there was “a growing recognition that a profound encounter with a single material discipline provides an extraordinary kind of education – one that teaches many transferrable skills.”²³⁹ Nevertheless, the fact that Brighton’s 3D Design and Craft has produced graduates including Phoebe Cummings and Nao Matsunaga – both of whom went on to study for MAs at the Royal College of Art, win the British Ceramics Biennial *Award* prize and secure V&A residencies – suggests that students can still flourish in and may even benefit from courses that combine a broader learning base with technical support.

In contrast to BA level education, the research profile of the disciplines that were traditionally associated with the crafts has been augmented since the late 1990s. Consequently, a number of research degrees, such as the one set out in this thesis, have been produced in faculties where undergraduate courses faced closure. As design historians Grace Lees-Maffei and Linda Sandino observed, these research centres have also supported much of the experimental ceramic practice in Britain.²⁴⁰ Undoubtedly, many of the practitioners whose works are discussed in this thesis have been able to develop their work, in part, due to the financial security provided by academic positions.

Those working within academia have also accelerated the critical consideration of both craft and ceramics-centred research. To some degree, these discussions mirrored those in arts faculties more generally, which focused on the fit between artistic practice and research frameworks that demanded

238 Craft Action Network, “What is the Craft Action Network?” The Craft Action Network, accessed October 21, 2014, <http://www.craft-action.org.uk/page/what-is-can>.

239 Tanya Harrod, “A Crisis in the Making,” *Crafts*, no. 219 (2009): 104.

240 Grace Lees-Maffei and Linda Sandino, “Dangerous Liaisons. Relationships Between Design, Art and Craft,” *Journal of Design History* 17, no. 3 (2004): 208.

measurable outcomes. However, for faculties grounded in single media and object production, the gulf between current practice and the collaborative, discursive and interdisciplinary projects that funders prioritised was wider. Consequently, much debate has focused on if and how ceramics and craft might meet the demands of research bodies. For example, in 2001 The University of Westminster held a conference, which asked if there was *A Research Culture for Ceramics*. Another conference that year, advertised on the same page of *Crafts – Pinning it Down. Crafts in the Changing Climate* – at Norwich School of Art and Design charted similar territory.²⁴¹ However, some have argued that these efforts to adapt instrumentalise practitioners, as they are “driven by the need for University research outputs” rather than being driven by shifts in artistic practice or theory.²⁴²

By this stage, arts departments were fully embedded in the RAE, which not only helped to determine the amount of funding they received, but also served as a public indicator of the quality of research at an institution, impacting on the level and standard of student applications and, therefore, the fees received. In 2003, Sir Gareth Roberts had undertaken a review of the Exercise, offering guidance on its future direction. The subsequent exercise included, amongst its indicators of excellence, “Significance: The degree to which the work has enhanced, or is likely to enhance, knowledge, thinking, understanding and/or practice in its field.”²⁴³ This emphasis on the field might be seen to encourage the type of field-first thinking that had dominated ceramic practice to this point. The titles of recent PhD theses including Wendy Tuxill’s *A Re-Conceptualisation of Contemporary Sculptural Ceramics From a Post-Minimalist*

241 Crafts, “Untitled,” *Crafts*, no. 169 (2001): 6. For example, the first *Idea and Act* symposium at Bath Spa University in 2007 raised fundamental questions about the type of work that new strands of funding in the arts and academia could accommodate.

242 Kate McIntyre, “Conference. A Challenging Debate,” *Crafts*, no. 191 (2004): 82. McIntyre was responding to 2004’s *Challenging Craft* conference at Gray’s School of Art, Robert Gordon University, but related it to other funding-led efforts to create critical debate about craft.

243 Research Assessment Exercise, *Section 3: Criteria and Working Methods. Main panel O*, (Bristol: Research Assessment Exercise, 2006), accessed August 12, 2014, <http://www.rae.ac.uk/pubs/2006/01/docs/o.pdf>.

Perspective (University of Hertfordshire, July 2010) and Laura Gray's *What is the Relationship between Contemporary Ceramics and Sculpture? How is this Relationship Negotiated and Revealed in Vessel-based Ceramics?* (Cardiff School of Art, 2013) might all be seen as symptomatic of a research culture within which originality and impact are more readily demonstrable within specific fields than within the sprawling intertextual realm of visual culture. However, as the same Exercise also included a provision to assess cross-disciplinary projects across distinct areas of practice they might equally be regarded as attempts to justify continued funding and separation of the ceramics departments to which they belonged.

As the rhetoric of the funding structures that supported universities, museums and broader arts funding became increasingly aligned, the activities of academics, artists and public arts organisations also became further enmeshed. In 2005, when the Arts and Humanities Research Board became a Council it gained the right to fund museums. It assisted a number of them – largely those with designated national status, including the V&A – to gain the status of Independent Research Organisations, rendering them eligible for funding. The same year the V&A launched a Collaborative Doctoral Award (CDA) scheme, working with partner Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) to fund doctoral research that developed new knowledge about the museum's collections.²⁴⁴ It also launched a Museums and Galleries Research fund. De Waal had already begun to conduct research in this area at the University of Westminster and in 2011 he and his colleagues, Twomey and Christie Brown secured AHRC-funding for *Behind the Scenes at the Museum: Ceramics in the Expanded Field* - the project of which this thesis forms a part.²⁴⁵ The relationship

244 V&A, "Collaborative Doctoral Partnerships," V&A Museum, accessed August 23, 2015, <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/c/cdps/>.

245 The recipients later reversed this title, so that it read 'Ceramics in the Expanded Field: Behind the Scenes at the Museum,' in order to reflect the dominant interests of the researchers. De Waal left the University at the start of the project and was replaced by Julian Stair. The project followed in the footsteps of the AHRC-funded *Context and Collaboration* project, which,

between ceramic practice and museums also formed a core part of Andrew Livingstone's research at the University of Sunderland and that of a number of his students, including David Cushway and Christopher McHugh. Furthermore, the relationship between ceramics and curating was at the heart of Gray's thesis, for which Livingstone was the external examiner.

These projects, all of which entailed a degree of partnership work with museums, might be seen to evidence the convergence of interests. Ceramics courses and museums were both attempting to negotiate territory within which shifts in production and reception had made it difficult to sustain existing disciplinary divisions, but they had not entirely abandoned them. The presence of critical studies on art curricula compelled students to consider where their work might sit within wider contexts, whilst the embrace of self-reflexive practice within museums, similarly, demanded a consideration of their limitations. Both were also attempting to attract wider audiences: as detailed above, museums endeavoured to be more inclusive in order to evidence their public value. By 2014, when the Research Excellence Framework (REF) replaced the RAE, there was also a greater emphasis on the impact that publicly funded research had beyond the narrow confines of academia.²⁴⁶

5. Beyond the bountiful

Reflecting on the New Labour era, Marijke Steedman noted, "We had by 2008 experienced some years of bountiful, yet conditional funding for art tackling social cohesion and exclusion."²⁴⁷ However, the creation of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition in 2010 saw a return to the narratives of the 1980s.

similarly, involved multiple institutions, and brought academics, curators and textile practitioners together.

²⁴⁶ Nigel Piercy, "Why it is fundamentally stupid for a business school to try to improve its RAE score," *European Journal of Marketing* 34, no. 1/2 (2000): 27-35. Piercy's review of the peer review process also highlighted the academic insularity of the assessment system and the type of outputs it privileged.

²⁴⁷ Marijke Steedman, ed. *Gallery and Community: Art, Education, Politics* (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2012), 6.

The governmental rhetoric turned the arms-length approach, which the Arts Council had adopted with the aim of freeing the arts from political instrumentalisation, on its head. It did so in order to justify the erosion of funding, arguing that distance from government support was a positive change: a move that had parallels with Minister for the Arts, Richard Luce's 1987 statement that a decreased dependence on state finance "minimises any danger of unhealthy restrictions on artistic expression."²⁴⁸

Kester has remarked on the implications that this shift towards private patronage has for those attempting to use art as a form of critique, claiming that:

Rather than providing a space for at least nominal resistance to the market (via regulation of the corporate sector, unemployment insurance, welfare, public education and healthcare etc.) the state increasingly functions to complement and reinforce the self-interest, possessive individualism and class hierarchy of the capitalist economy.²⁴⁹

Harnessed to entrepreneurship, artistic production is regarded as a low-cost means of creating capital and improving the economy. As the government attempts, once more, to achieve a balance between arts funding in the regions and the capital in response to the 2013 report *Rebalancing Our Cultural Capital* it is also likely that artists, museums and educational institutions will become further engaged in projects that centre on urban regeneration and community cohesion.²⁵⁰ Certainly, the Heritage Lottery Fund's *Heritage and Place* scheme, which aims to build local capacity to support heritage-centred efforts at 'place making,' indicates further work in this area, albeit more economy-driven.²⁵¹

248 Rt. Hon Richard Luce M.P., "Foreword," in *The Arts. The Next Move Forward. A Plurality of Riches: A Plurality of Funding*, 5.

249 Grant Kester, "Introduction," in *Gallery as Community: Art, Education, Politics*, ed. Marijke Steedman (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2012), 11.

250 Peter Stark, Christopher Gordon and David Powell, *Rebalancing Our Cultural Capital. A Contribution to the Debate on National Policy for the Arts and Culture in England*, 2013, accessed June 22 2015 www.theroccreport.co.uk.

251 Heritage Lottery Fund, *Heritage and Place: Phase 2* (London: Heritage Lottery Fund, 2014).

Although these new sources of funding have opened up new opportunities and ways of working for ceramists, the frameworks that underpin them are, on the whole, better suited to 'itinerant artists,' who can freely move from project to project.²⁵² As addressed previously, this characterisation does not fit with traditional models of studio craft, which still form the core of ceramics practice. Indeed, although the 2010 study *Making Value: Craft and the Economic and Social Contribution of Makers*, suggested that 65-70% of makers were 'portfolio workers,' who went "beyond the making, exhibition and sale of a craft object," of those discussed in detail in the report, all of those working in ceramics had access to facilities.²⁵³ However, the issue of studio provision has become particularly pressing with the closure of ceramics departments and the decline of craft-based education in schools. Although the V&A opened a fully equipped ceramics studio space in 2009 and other arts venues, such as Camden Arts Centre also offer facilities, the impact that the move towards theory and site-specificity will have on the types of ceramic work produced and collected in the future, therefore, warrants consideration.

Conclusion

This chapter has identified a number of 'shifters' that have shaped ceramic practice and which will, therefore, provide key points of reference in subsequent chapters. Firstly, the relocation of ceramic practice to college art departments and the concurrent focus on contextual studies fuelled the division between skills-based training, which focused on a particular (vocational) application and more exploratory, art-oriented practices, the results of which were intended to be 'shown.' Drawing support from the same funding body –

'Despite the importance attached to it by civic leaders heritage is often not considered as a strategic asset in major place shaping discussions or strategy for economic and social regeneration.'

²⁵² The itinerant artist is discussed in more detail in subsequent chapters.

²⁵³ Mary Schwartz and Dr Karen Yair, *Making Value: Craft and the Economic and Social Contribution of Makers* (London: Crafts Council, 2010).

the CAC/Crafts Council – practitioners shared a technical base, but divergent aims. This split thus forms the backdrop to clashes over the Crafts Council’s support of the ‘artist craftsman.’ However, this support also made it more difficult for those producing art-oriented work to break from the crafts, leading to the continued use of terms such as ‘ceramic sculpture,’ which, like ‘artist craftsman’ separate their object from the two terms it encompasses, leaving them in ‘limbo.’

Secondly, the period between the Wilding Report (1989) and its becoming a client of the Arts Council (1999) led to a period of questioning about the identity of the crafts, which may have informed subsequent efforts to historicise and theorise ceramics and ‘the crafts,’ such as Harrod’s *The Crafts in the Twentieth Century* (1999), De Waal’s *20th Century Ceramics* (2003) and Adamson’s *Thinking Through Craft* (2007), as well as the ‘gestures of showing’ that are addressed throughout this thesis. The search for ‘significance’ in academic research might also be seen to have encouraged a focus on these subjects. However, as Holert has observed:

The urge among institutions of art and design education to rush the process of laying down validating and legitimating criteria to purportedly render intelligible the quality of art and design’s “new knowledge” results in sometimes bizarre and ahistorical variations on the semantics of practice and research, knowledge and knowledge production.²⁵⁴

His words serve as a caution for the subsequent investigations in this thesis, which will attend to the specificities of each ‘gesture of showing’ and question their link to the institutions that sustain and promote ‘ceramics’ as a distinctive art form.

Finally, this chapter highlighted the way in which political and arts policies have married support for contemporary practice to government priorities, from entrepreneurialism to regional regeneration and social inclusion. Any analysis of ‘gestures of showing’ must also, therefore, consider

254 Tom Holert, “Art in the Knowledge-based Polis.”

their relationship to the statements that funders intend them to make: in particular, museums' efforts to make their collections more accessible and enhance public engagement. Whilst it is apparent that these 'shifters' have provided greater opportunities for ceramists to produce site-specific works, this research may also raise questions about the future of the ceramic art object

Chapter THREE: Ceramic practice and the collection

Since the 1990s, a number of ceramic practitioners have produced high-profile interventions in museum collections. As addressed in previous chapters, these projects form part of a broader contemporary trend whereby museums commission artists to reinterpret their collections and spaces and create works that engage audiences. Authors such as Buchloh (1990) and Putnam (2001) have analysed the historical relationship between fine art practice and the museum in detail. Its recent trajectory has also been examined in publications including *New Institutionalism* (2003) and *Art and its Institutions: Current Conflicts, Critique and Collaborations* (2006). However, as gallerist and critic Garth Clark has forwarded, the history of ceramics cannot be directly mapped onto those of fine art and design practice.

Attempting to fill this gap, this chapter interrogates the role that art-oriented ceramic works and the artists that make them have played in British museums. Firstly, it examines how and why these works have been collected and how their position in relation to museums' historical collections and interpretative priorities has shifted. Moving on to address how museum objects have acted as sources of inspiration for ceramic practitioners, it outlines the how the resultant works have been re-appropriated as interpretation.

Turning to the issue of critique, it argues that, due to the ambiguous identity that ceramic practice had in the 1970s it lacked a definitive institution to rail against. Furthermore, it argues that subsequent interventions, which have capitalized on the narrative potential of ceramic objects have re-framed ceramic practice as much as the museum. Proceeding from Bal, who has suggested that the multi-medial character of museums can create opportunities to challenge the specious divisions between media-based disciplines, it

underscores the ways in which collections-based projects can foreground the discursive potential of ceramic practice.²⁵⁵

1. Accommodating the contemporary

The majority of British museums that have assembled medium-specific collections of ceramics, taking their lead from the South Kensington Museum (later the Victoria & Albert Museum, or V&A), have done so within the categories of decorative and applied arts or, latterly, crafts. Nevertheless, objects made from clay have been collected by many different types of museum and are dispersed across departments within them, including those devoted to archaeology, social history and ethnography. However, until the post-war period British museums' patronage of contemporary ceramics - and contemporary art in general - was limited.²⁵⁶

The V&A's founding collection was largely comprised of modern manufactured goods, including works acquired from international exhibitions, and those by the students of the Government School of Design. They also commissioned high quality replicas of famous objects and collected contemporary objects throughout the 1800s. However, by the turn of the century there had been a marked shift in collecting patterns, which favoured older objects. V&A historian Christopher Wilk has attributed this to the museum board's antiquarian preferences and nationalistic reactions against European modernism.²⁵⁷ As a result of this change of emphasis, contemporary acquisitions were separated out from the designated areas of collection and

255 Mieke Bal, *Double Exposures: The Subject of Cultural Analysis*, 3.

256 Janet Minihan, *The Nationalization of Culture. The Development of State Subsidies to the Arts in Great Britain*.

257 Christopher Wilk, "Collecting the Twentieth Century" in *A Grand Design. A History of the Victoria & Albert Museum*, ed. Brenda Richardson, accessed October 1, 2012,

http://www.vam.ac.uk/vastatic/microsites/1159_grand_design/essay-collecting-the_new.html.

Wilk cites the negative reaction to dealer George Donaldson's gift of 30 art nouveau items from the 1900 Paris Exposition as a key turning point Donaldson's 1901 gift elicited critical outrage as well as a backlash from the Council of the Royal College of Art and the fallout impacted on the museum's attitude to the acquisition of modern specimens.

considered on a case-by-case basis, or – if they were contemporary manufactured wares – relocated to the museum’s Bethnal Green outpost, when the museum was renovated in 1908.²⁵⁸ The V&A’s responsibility for modern design was further devolved to the British Institute of Industrial Art (BIIA) in 1920. Although the BIIA held exhibitions in the museum’s North Court throughout that decade, it maintained a separate status: a model of devolved responsibility that was to characterise the V&A’s approach to the contemporary for decades to come.

This arms-length approach limited the purchase of ceramic items produced during the previous fifty years, providing a buffer between the V&A curators and the market. It reflected the position forwarded in the 1908 Report of the Committee for Rearrangement, which had stressed the importance of maintaining a gap between production and acquisition. The committee proposed that this space gave curators distance from which to appraise the historical value of an object and also spared them from accusations of influencing the market.²⁵⁹ As Bourdieu has argued, whilst museums were foremost amongst the institutions that were able to “conserve the capital of symbolic goods,” they did so by simultaneously denying their role in assigning that symbolic capital.²⁶⁰ The Committee’s strategy, therefore, allowed the museum to sustain that position, perpetuating the idea that the curator’s selections were rational: based on the analysis of objective data and the application of expertise, rather than subjective opinion.

By contrast, private collectors were permitted a degree of subjectivity and idiosyncrasy. This may explain why, in the early twentieth century, V&A curators were able to acquire several works by studio potters such as Reginald Wells and Bernard Leach by carefully cultivating donors who purchased works

258 Board of Education, *The Victoria and Albert Museum (Art Division) Report of the Committee for Rearrangement* (London: HMSO, 1908).

259 Victoria and Albert Museum, *Report of the Committee of Rearrangement* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1908).

260 Pierre Bourdieu, “The Market of Symbolic Goods,” 7.

on their behalf. In doing so, they exercised their own tastes, whilst maintaining the guise of distanced professionalism. Nevertheless, when compelled to provide a rationale for collecting those objects, they often suggested they were the continuation of an existing tradition, rather than confronting their contemporary status.²⁶¹ For example, in 1923 Rackham described a Bernard Leach dish as an “interesting revival of an old technique.”²⁶² This foreshadowed discursive approaches to showing that would be used to argue that handcrafted objects possessed a purity of spirit that modern society had lost. Imbued with a non-specific past-ness, they were denied (or shielded from) analysis of their contemporary role.

In the same vein, the bequest of existing private collections, such as the 2nd Lieutenant Francis Bedford Marsh 1914-1918 Memorial Gift to the V&A, Stoke-on-Trent’s Henry Bergen Collection (1948) and The Milner-White collection, which was donated to York Art Gallery in 1963, also provided an entry route into permanent collections. Whilst medium-specific departments still administered them, these collections were arranged according to their own internal logic. Presented in this way, merit was assigned to contemporary objects by virtue of their provenance as part of a prestigious collection.

Organisations such as The Contemporary Art Society (CAS) further served to mediate between artist, collector and curator in this area. Founded in 1910, with the aim of promoting work produced within the last twenty years, the Society purchased contemporary works for donation to public museums and galleries, as well as brokering deals for existing collections to enter museums.²⁶³ It established a distinct pottery and craft section in 1928, spearheaded by private collector and studio pottery enthusiast, Ernest Marsh,

261 Oliver Watson, “Justification and Means: The Early Acquisition of Pots in the Victoria and Albert Museum,” *The Burlington Magazine* 1, no. 1046 (1990): 358.

262 Ibid., 358.

263 Judith Collins, “The Origins and Aims of the Contemporary Art Society,” in *British Contemporary Art 1910-1990. Eighty years of collecting by the Contemporary Art Society* (London: The Herbert Press, Limited, 1991), 15-22.

who acted as sole selector until 1943.²⁶⁴ Amongst other activities, the CAS donated eleven pieces of ceramics to the V&A during the 1930s and, during the Second World War, distributed another large gift, which led to the establishment of The Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter. However, Marsh, who was the driving force behind the craft section died in 1945 and the fund was wound up in 1948.

The ambiguous position that studio pottery occupied at this point was further complicated by the activities of museums' education and touring departments, which both purchased contemporary potters' works and were part of potters' education. Established in 1852, the V&A's Circulation Department was foremost amongst these. It had initially catered to the needs of art schools and industrial apprentices, loaning out reproductions and winning entries from national art competitions for training and direct copying. The majority of the exhibitions it loaned to schools consisted of high quality replicas, which could be hung on walls. However, the Circulation Department's first piece by William Staite-Murray was acquired in 1927 as an inspiring example for pottery students.²⁶⁵

Other museums, and the authorities that ran them, also acquired works by established studio potters for their educational loan collections. Derbyshire County Council's collection, which was administered by Sudbury Hall, included work by Bernard and Janet Leach, Katherine Pleydell-Bouverie and Hans Coper.²⁶⁶ The National Museum of Wales Schools Collection was also the main destination for contemporary ceramics between the 1950s until the

264 Christopher Jordan, *Steering Taste: Ernest Marsh, A Study of Private Collecting in England in the Early 20th Century* (PhD diss., University of the Arts, London, 2006): 297. "With few exceptions. Marsh's choices for the Contemporary Art Society evinced a symbolic and important link reaching back to May Morris's ideal that 'executive skill and the desire and feeling for beauty could be realised in a work of definite utility' (Morris 1893 pref.)"

265 Oliver Watson, "Justification and Means: The Early Acquisition of Pots in the Victoria and Albert Museum," 360. See also Victoria and Albert Museum, *V&A Museum Circulation Department: Its History and Scope*. (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1950).

266 Emmanuel Cooper, "Obituary: Rollo Ballantyne," *Independent*, January 23, 1999, accessed March 3, 2013, <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/obituary-rollo-ballantyne-1075640.html>.

1990s.²⁶⁷ Indeed, in 1960 when Rollo Charles, curator of the National Museum organised an ambitious exhibition of Artist Potters at their branch museum, Turner House, approximately half of the works purchased from the exhibition were destined for the Museum's educational collection and Newport Museum's School Service collection. Including pots by Dan Arbeid, Alan Caiger Smith, Lucie Rie and James Tower, all of whom now occupy the upper echelons of the studio pottery hierarchy, this group of acquisitions now takes pride of place in the Museum's permanent collection. Nevertheless, as Joanna Weddell has elucidated in her analysis of the V&A Circulation Department's activities, such purchases were driven by art colleges, who demanded the new, as much as the curator's foresight.²⁶⁸

As well as fulfilling a formal educational role, the Circulation Department had served regional museums since the 1880s. However, in the tough post-war financial climate, it stepped up activity in this area.²⁶⁹ Circulation Department exhibitions, together with other loan exhibitions from private collectors and organisations such as the CAS, The Design Centre (which the COID established in 1956) and local ceramics groups, formed the main outlets for contemporary ceramic practice in regional museums between the 1940s and 1970s.²⁷⁰

Several of these exhibitions provided opportunities for recent works to be considered on their own merit, rather than as the latest terms in a narrative of stylistic evolution as they might have been were they subsumed into existing ceramic arrangements. For example, the Circulation Department's *British Studio*

267 Miscellaneous letters and receipts, March 1961, Exhibitions 1961 box, Jan 7 – Feb 5, 1969 Artist Potters folder, National Museum of Wales exhibition archive, National Museum Wales, Cardiff.

268 Joanna Weddell, "Room 38A and Beyond: Post-War British Design and the Circulation Department," *V&A Research Journal*, 4 (Summer, 2012), accessed December 8, 2012, <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/journals/research-journal/issue-no.-4-summer-2012/room-38a-and-beyond-post-war-british-design-and-the-circulation-department>.

269 Victoria and Albert Museum, *V&A Museum Circulation Department: Its History and Scope*, 1.

270 The Contemporary Art Society toured new acquisitions before distributing them. Weddell's text cites gives further detail about the importance role that circulation department exhibitions played in regional museums. Joanna Weddell, "Room 38A and beyond: Post-war British Design and the Circulation Department."

Pottery (1964-65) surveyed developments from the 1920s until the late 1950s, placing a special emphasis on “work that is being produced today.”²⁷¹ Similarly, objects by Rie, Caiger-Smith, Arbeid, Gillian Lowndes and Anthony Hepburn were selected for *Five Studio Potters*, which toured from 1971, on the grounds that they demonstrated “a wide variety of individual approach to the use and development of pottery as a medium.”²⁷² It was a group whose works diverged from the dominant Anglo-Oriental model of studio pottery of the time in differing ways. Rie produced vessels that were inspired by European Modernist design; Caiger-Smith produced highly-decorated tin-glazed earthenwares; Arbeid’s highly textured, hand-built works tested the limits of utilitarian form; Lowndes’s ambiguous objects were often archaeological in appearance and incorporated motifs and forms drawn from everyday life, whilst Hepburn’s slab-built stoneware boxes bore the influence of ‘Funk ceramics’ – a term art historian Peter Selz coined to describe the pop-art inspired work of US ceramists such as Robert Arneson.²⁷³ This temporary agglomeration, therefore, gestured to the issues faced by those who might try to assign ceramic works to the categories with which ceramics has been traditionally associated, such as the crafts: they were not “studio pottery,” writ large, but, instead, five individual artists. However, displayed together and detached from other forms of ceramic practice, their potential to disrupt existing narratives about it was minimalized.

The touring exhibitions produced by museum departments and external organisations in this period, thus, enabled regional museums to address current practice without the political and financial commitment of permanent acquisition. However, it might also be argued that they restricted the scope of contemporary collecting and limited regional variance by acquiring

271 Victoria and Albert Museum, *British Studio Pottery* - VX.1959.009, (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1959). The exhibition toured widely, including, as Weddell has shown, travelling to Belfast, Glasgow, Keighley, Kettering and Lancaster between 1964-5.

272 Victoria and Albert Museum, *Five Studio Potters* - VX.1971.015 (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1971).

273 Peter Selz, *Funk* (California: University of California Press, 1967), 3.

contemporary works on a relatively small scale, yet distributing them widely. To a degree, this situation was remedied in the 1970s, when attitudes to contemporary ceramics shifted and new funding streams became available. The founding of the CAC in 1971 had helped to raise the profile of contemporary crafts and it provided funding for museums to buy works, organise exhibitions and arrange craft activities. Along with other factors, including the crafts revival and the Arts Council's broader promotion of contemporary practice, this led to concerted efforts to collect contemporary ceramics in the 1970s.²⁷⁴

A survey of contemporary English crafts collections conducted by *Crafts* magazine in 1980 revealed that Lotherton Hall (1973) Bristol Museum and Art Gallery (1973), Swindon Museum and Art Gallery (1974), Portsmouth City Museum and Art Gallery (1975), the Shipley Art Gallery (1975), Sudbury Hall (1978) and Stoke-on-Trent City Museum and Art Gallery (1979) all set up contemporary collections, in which ceramics were heavily represented, during this period.²⁷⁵ Norfolk Contemporary Crafts Committee also initiated an extensive programme of collaboration, collecting and commissioning at Norwich Castle Museum in the early 1970s, and Curator Judy Rudoe has noted "a new sense of urgency about the [British] Museum's responsibility towards the 20th century" from the late 1970s.²⁷⁶ Nonetheless, it might be argued that the top-down dissemination of collections and interpretative material from the V&A to the regions had inhibited the development of curatorial knowledge of contemporary ceramics. Although by 1977, Director Roy Strong had acknowledged that the V&A's role in relation to regional museums was changing, his proposal that it should set an example by commissioning modern

274 Her Majesty's Government, *A Policy for the Arts: the Arts; the First Steps*, Cmnd. 4676 (London: HMSO, 1965). The prioritisation of the living artist was a central theme of the Government's first arts policy.

275 A. Wigglesworth, "Museums Collect," *Crafts*, no. 45 (1980): 17-30.

276 Judy Rudoe, "An Historical Continuum: Collecting 20th-century Applied Art from Europe and America at The British Museum" in *The International Art and Design Fair 1900-2001* (n.p. New York, 2002), 15-28. However, the British Museum limited their remit to pre-1950s applied arts "to preserve their historical character" and as an acknowledgement of the V&A's responsibility in this area. In doing so, they retained the benefit of hindsight, acquiring works when they might be regarded as documentary evidence of historical trends.

craftsmen retained a paternalistic edge.²⁷⁷ In light of this it is unsurprising that, when questioned about their collecting strategies three years later, staff at the Shipley Art Gallery, spoke of their continued dependence on the V&A for guidance when purchasing contemporary craft.²⁷⁸

As the V&A was, at least in part, relinquishing its hold on the wider public dissemination of craft practice another institution was taking over than mantle. The CAC had begun to produce exhibitions of contemporary work at its gallery in Waterloo Place (1973- 1990), which Director Victor Margrie argued would be “broadly educational in content,” in contrast to the commercial focus of the British Crafts Centre.²⁷⁹ Keen to differentiate itself from its design-led predecessors, the CAC’s educational ambition might be better described as a profile-raising initiative to promote the virtues of art-oriented craft. The Committee had established its own collection in 1972 and Margrie argued that it could commission work and take chances that a national museum could not.²⁸⁰ However, whilst its remit to support living makers allowed it more freedom in this area, by largely separating contemporary ceramic practice from both historic precedents and wider artistic practice it offered a narrow view of it.²⁸¹ It might also be argued that by providing such a distinct and dominant arena for contemporary work, the Committee’s strategies - like earlier temporary and touring initiatives – conflicted with their efforts to encourage wider and more long-term investment on the part of museums.

277 Museums Association, “The Artist Craftsman and Museums Today. Joint report of one day seminar held in London, 5th April, organized by the Crafts Advisory Committee and the Area Museums Service for South Eastern England with the support of the Museums Association,” *Museums Journal*, vol. 77, no.1 (1977): 25-28;

278 A. Wigglesworth, “Museums Collect,” 17-30.

279 Museums Association, “The Artist Craftsman and Museums Today. Joint report of one day seminar held in London, 5th April, organized by the Crafts Advisory Committee and the Area Museums Service for South Eastern England with the support of the Museums Association,” 25. Commerciality clearly did not extend to retail, as the Committee assumed responsibility for the crafts shop at the V&A in 1974.

280 Victor Margrie, “The Work of the Crafts Advisory Committee,” 117-8.

281 This is something the Crafts Council have sought to remedy since the mid 2000s, by collaborating with museums and galleries, lending objects and creating touring exhibitions.

Although it provided the venue for the CAC's first major exhibition – *The Craftsman's Art* (1973) – the direct impact of these changes on collecting strategies at the V&A, which already had a responsibility for craft media, was less apparent. In a draft article for the Times Educational Supplement in 1976 Strong declared "Ever since I became Director of the V&A in 1974 it has been a central thread of policy that the Museum should actively associate itself with the whole spectrum of contemporary creativity in the decorative arts, and in particular the renaissance of the artist craftsman."²⁸² However, the article was tied to a public event featuring living craftsmen and he went on to describe the museum's role in encouraging public patronage and on increasing practical understanding of the crafts, rather than purchasing contemporary work for its collections.

The Museum also launched its craft shop in 1974, which was sponsored by the Crafts Advisory Committee and managed by The BCC – a committee from which selected the works.²⁸³ Museologist Helen Rees Leahy has suggested that the opening of the shop 'signalled Strong's commitment to contemporary patronage by providing a permanent commercial showcase for makers and encouraging museum visitors to buy their work.'²⁸⁴ It also allowed museum staff to remain apprised of recent developments. Despite its independent status, the shop too, therefore, as Clive Wainwright, who worked with the museum's collections from 1966-99, later admitted, informed the curators' views of the crafts.²⁸⁵

In fact, whilst curators at the Shipley were looking to the V&A for guidance, curators at the V&A were, in turn, looking to the BCC. This situation

282 Dr Roy Strong, Draft article for Times Educational Supplement, March 1976, Box MA29 [Press office file], folder 219, The Makers: Artist Craftsmen at Work. 29 Dec – 3 Jan 1975, Victoria and Albert Museum archive, Blythe House.

283 Roy Strong, "Craft Shop at the V&A," *Ceramic Review*, no. 19 (1974): 16.

284 Helen Rees Leahy, "These Tumultuous, Gloomy Years: Museums in the 1970s," in *Three by One: A Selection from Three Public Craft Collections*, eds. Alison Britton and Simon Olding (London: Crafts Council, 2009), 37.

285 Clive Wainwright, "Untitled," in Crafts Council, *Twenty Five Years: Crafts Council Shop at the Victoria and Albert Museum* (London: Crafts Council and Victoria and Albert Museum: 1999), 57.

demanded a reconsideration of existing notions of authority within the museum. As Nathalie Heinich and Michael Pollak have discussed, whilst traditional models of curatorship were based upon the ability to preserve, analyse and present works in relation to pre-established histories, those curating the contemporary are denied historical perspective. Their role, which Heinich and Pollack liken to that of the auteur in cinema, therefore entails a degree of risk-taking – highlighting the subjectivity of their choices and their power to consecrate particular objects and artworks.²⁸⁶ By, instead, deferring to external bodies, the curators were able to side-step this challenge to their alleged neutrality.

Despite this, when the Circulation Department was closed in 1977 as part of a restructure, its displays – many of which were thematic and multidisciplinary – were dismantled and the works absorbed into the museum's existing materials-based collections, necessitating further involvement with the contemporary. However, in what might be seen as a continuation of the V&A's tradition of linking the contemporary to education, Strong also tasked the museum's materials based departments with developing collections of objects made after 1920 that might inspire contemporary makers. This manifested Strong's interest in revisiting the museum's founding mission to reform the mass manufacturer – something he felt the craft revival had sidelined.²⁸⁷

2. Inspiration

Developed in tandem with new government schools of design, museum collections have been promoted as a means of inspiring contemporary practice since the V&A's inception in the mid-1800s. The Museum's director, Henry

286 Nathalie Heinich and Michael Pollak, "From Museum Curator to Exhibition Auteur. Inventing a Singular Position," in *Thinking About Exhibitions*, eds. Reesa Greenberg, Barry Ferguson and Sandy Nairne (London; New York: Routledge), 166-176.

287 A. Wigglesworth, "Museums Collect," 17.

Cole, hoped that exposure to carefully chosen museum objects would educate students of the School of Design, as well as inculcating a taste for “good design” in the public, who would then demand a similar quality from British manufacturers.²⁸⁸ Aesthetic debate at the time was focused on the poor economic performance of British industrial design, when compared to its continental rivals: something that was attributed to British industrial designers’ pursuit of novelty and taste for excessive embellishment.²⁸⁹ Instead, design reformers, such as Cole, advocated a policy of appropriate design, which was influenced by the ideas of architect and theorist Gottfried Semper.²⁹⁰ Cole had invited Semper to submit a design for the museum that eventually became the V&A, which the Board of Trade later dismissed as too costly.²⁹¹ However, he also commissioned him to produce *Practical Art in Metal and Hard Materials (ware): Its Technology, History and Styles*: a study in which Semper set out a thesis on the ideal structure of museums.²⁹² In it he expanded on earlier writings in which he had identified ‘four elements’ that could be used to categorise objects according to the factors that motivated their production.²⁹³ Pottery was captured in a category devoted to “ceramics or the kneading of other soft plastic materials,” yet, as historian Harry Francis Mallgrave has observed, in

288 Rafael Cardoso Denis, “Teaching by Example: Education and the Formation of South Kensington’s Museums ” in *A Grand Design. A History of the Victoria & Albert Museum*, ed. Brenda Richardson, accessed October 1, 2012,

http://www.vam.ac.uk/vastatic/microsites/1159_grand_design/essay-teaching-by-example_new.html.

289 Ralph Nicholson Wornum, “The Exhibition as a Lesson in Taste,” *The Art Journal Illustrated Catalogue: The Industry of All Nations* (1851): i-xxii.

290 Michael Conforti, “The Idealist Enterprise and the Applied Arts ” in *A Grand Design, The Art of the Victoria & Albert Museum*, ed. Brenda Richardson, accessed October 1, 2012, http://www.vam.ac.uk/vastatic/microsites/1159_grand_design/essay-the-idealist-enterprise_new.html. Although several of Semper’s key works were not translated into English until after work on the V&A had begun, he lectured in the UK and his ideas about museums were discussed at the V&A during the 1880s.

291 Harry Francis Mallgrave, *Gottfried Semper: Architect of the Nineteenth Century*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 312.

292 Peter Noever, ed. *Ideal Museum: Gottfried Semper’s Practical Art in Metals* (Schlebrugge: MAK, 2007). Original published 1867.

293 Ibid. Semper also regarded his subject, architecture, as a fifth category, which combined the other elements.

Semper's explanation "the particular material used in each of these processes is irrelevant; what counts is the motive itself."²⁹⁴ Expanding upon this, he suggested that within Semper's framework, a zigzag pattern on a ceramic object might be seen to refer to the textile origin of the design in basket weaving.²⁹⁵

The V&A's overall design and departmental structure was informed by Semper's notion that museums could provide "a sort of index to the history of culture" in which objects and the laws of each element be compared.²⁹⁶ Accordingly, although there were galleries devoted to the material culture of specific geographical regions, the 'study galleries' were divided into the categories wood, metal, ceramics, textiles and engraving. Architect and historian Mari Hvattum has suggested Semper's approach was a characteristically modern effort to rationalise cultural production by establishing a framework through which the past and present could be analysed and future developments predicted.²⁹⁷ Moreover, art historian Matthew Rampley has noted, taken in isolation, the material and technique-led aspects of Semper's approach to aesthetic development, also offered little space for the role that social and economic factors or, indeed, the creative imagination, can play in driving change.²⁹⁸ Whilst his work on motivation gestured to an understanding of medium-specificity in which process and material were not indelibly linked, it might also, therefore, be argued that it was constrained by his focus on order. Seizing upon this idea, the museum's curators were able to insert objects into displays that transformed their conceptions of good design into the objective history of design. They also

294 Harry Francis Mallgrave, *Gottfried Semper: Architect of the Nineteenth Century*, 211.

295 Ibid., 211.

296 Now called the materials and techniques galleries and supplemented by other methods of display, these galleries retain their purpose as places for academic contemplation and connoisseurial comparison of styles in the present day.

297 Mari Hvattum, "'A Complete and Universal Collection.' Gottfried Semper and the Great Exhibition," in *Tracing Modernity: Manifestations of the Modern in Architecture and the City*, eds. Mari Hvattum and Christian Hermansen (London, Routledge: 2004), 129-30.

298 Matthew Rampley, *The Vienna School of Art History: Empire and the Politics of Scholarship 1847-1918* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press: 2013). Rampley's analysis centres on Alois Riegl's critique of Semper's work *Style in the Technical or Tectonic Arts, or, Practical Aesthetics* (1860-62).

provided a model of disciplinarity that has had continued impact on the organisation and teaching of ceramic practice, which largely proceeds from the mastery of material, rather than the practitioner's objective.

The South Kensington model became the prototype for the collection and display of ceramics across Europe. However, at this stage the relationship between the historic and the contemporary was largely viewed as a one-way flow of influence based on the 'transmission model' of communication where the receiver, whether art student or member of an undifferentiated public, absorbs the knowledge offered to them in visual form.²⁹⁹ Furthermore, by the early twentieth century the main museum largely functioned as a treasure house and educational activities were, as discussed above, devolved to departments such as Circulation. It was only in the 1970s, as part of wider re-evaluations of their purpose, that museums began to explore the dialogic nature of the encounter between historic and the contemporary.

As addressed earlier in this chapter, Roy Strong drove this shift at the V&A and in 1976 he nailed his colours to the mast, declaring: "To me, as an historian, one must always go back in order to go forward [...] For far too long art schools have despised the study of the past and its techniques of design and manufacture."³⁰⁰ However, at the time Strong was speaking, in a period of national financial crisis, the issue of the museum's contemporary relevance had become increasingly pressing. His stance is, therefore, legible as an attempt to justify the museum's dependence on the public purse as much as an ideological shift.

In the same vein, the museum had initiated a programme of craft demonstrations a year prior to Strong's statement, where selected craftspeople gave demonstrations in the museum alongside objects from the museum's collections, which related to their practice. Expanding on the motivation for the

299 Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, "Changing Values in the Art Museum: Rethinking Communication and Learning," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 6, no. 1 (2000): 15.

300 Roy Strong, Draft article for Times Educational Supplement, March 1976, The Makers: Artist Craftsmen at Work, 29 Dec – 3 Jan 1975, Victoria and Albert Museum archive.

events, which were titled *The Makers* (1975-6) and *Man-made: Demonstrations by Thirteen Craftsmen* (1976-7), organizer Eileen Graham proposed:

In museums people see objects from different periods and in different styles – dead objects out of context with life and human contact. They are resurrected by scholars, lecturers and artists who promote interest in them, but to the ordinary layman they appear to be remote from his lifestyle. By introducing modern craftsmen into the museum, making objects for contemporary use, but in some cases with inspiration drawn from museum objects, it seemed possible to bridge the gap so that visitors would see objects as extensions of man's ideas and concepts.³⁰¹

Through this gesture of showing, which identified process as the common denominator shared by contemporary and historic practitioners, the 'makers,' who included ceramists Walter Keeler, Ray Silverman and Mo Jupp demonstrated their own work and may also have fostered new public understandings of historic objects – a claim that is analysed in greater detail in chapter five. Nonetheless, Strong saw such contextualisation as the province of the education department, rather than curatorial staff and the focus was on the exhibitors' interpretative role, rather than their work.³⁰² Produced at a pivotal moment when the Circulation Department was about to close, this might be also regarded as an attempt to sustain the arms-length approach to the contemporary deemed appropriate to the curators' roles, whilst capitalising on the public appeal of craft at that time.

The discursive power of exposition had not escaped the attention of the CAC either and for its 1981 exhibition *The Maker's Eye* (briefly addressed in chapter one) it invited craft practitioners including Britton, Emmanuel Cooper and Cardew, to curate displays that represented their view of craft.³⁰³ Organisers encouraged the selectors to eschew the historic in favour of work

301 Eileen Graham, letter to Manchester Polytechnic, 17 February, 1977, Man-Made: Demonstrations by Thirteen Craftsmen 1 Dec – 30 Jan 1977, V&A Museum archive.

302 Dr Roy Strong, "Forty Years On: The Victoria and Albert Museum and the Regions," *Museums Journal* 75, no. 3 (1975): 103.

303 As well as being a studio potter, Cooper was co-editor of *Ceramic Review* at the time.

made in the past ten years, aiming to demonstrate the “variety and vitality of the crafts.”³⁰⁴ However, Cardew, whose display only featured studio pottery, positioned his work within a lineage that included a number of early works by Leach, Staite-Murray, Norah Braden and Katherine Pleydell-Bouverie. By contrast, Britton chose a range of contemporary material, but made it clear that she found the framework of the exhibition limiting, as it excluded objects that influenced, but stood outside of the crafts.³⁰⁵ In doing so, she underscored an issue that was apparent at the moment Semper’s notion of ‘elements’ was transmuted into medium-based categories at the V&A: confining any medium to a fixed set of positions restricts opportunities for advancement and innovation, whether technically or critically. Indeed, the obsession with the vessel as vehicle and subject, which characterised the work of Britton and many of her contemporaries at that point, might be seen to reflect the naturalisation of this way of thinking. The fact that Britton was able to recognise that the notion of ‘the crafts,’ was inadequate when describing her influences, yet continued to exhibit her work within crafts contexts shows the hegemony of craft-centred understandings of ceramic practice at the time.

As a discursive act, rather than demonstrating the breadth of the crafts, the exhibition brought the tensions between work and categorisation to the fore. Exploiting the dialogic capabilities of objects, Britton included a David Cripps photograph of a group of unglazed Elizabeth Fritsch pots, which highlighted the play between two and three dimensionality in Fritsch’s work, as well as inviting visual comparison with Giorgio Morandi’s still life paintings of vessels.³⁰⁶ She also created a visual conference between a Bernard Myers still life and the work of Andrew Lord, who created uncanny, three-dimensional renderings of painted objects [fig. 1]. In this light, efforts to confine either the works Britton selected or the eclectic range of objects chosen by others, which

304 Victor Margrie, “Introduction,” in *The Maker’s Eye*, 5.

305 Alison Britton, “Untitled,” in *The Maker’s Eye*, 16.

306 Britton also paired a William Scott drawing of plain vessels with an asymmetrical pot by Fritsch, which was formed and decorated to resemble a drawing of a pot.

included everything from a tooting plane (chosen by David Pye) to a Perspex Post Office wall sign (David Kindersley) to the crafts seemed incredibly limiting. The eclecticism of the choices also highlighted the challenge those trying to define the crafts faced and its uncertain identity. It is telling, therefore, that most of the Council's exhibitions in the 1980s and '90s focused on individual makers or themes, rather than attempting to address broader categories, such as ceramics or craft, which might draw attention to the indeterminacy of its remit.

Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s the most high profile interactions between ceramic practitioners and museum collections tended, like *The Maker's Eye*, to centre on exhibition. Whether curating or contributing catalogue essays, they exploited the exhibition's potential as a means of history writing to such an extent that the subject has warranted a chapter of its own. Other expositional activities, for example, Takeshi Yasuda's residency at the Cleveland Craft Centre (1984), like aforementioned V&A initiatives *The Makers* and *Man-made*, largely married education and demonstration. However, by the late 1990s museums had begun to invite a range of artists, including ceramists, to produce and exhibit works that inscribed the influence of historical collections in their very fabric.

These exhibitions might be regarded as manifestations of part of the growing concern with maximizing public engagement with museum collections. As detailed in chapter two, in the late 1990s, the cultural policies of John Major's Conservative and Tony Blair's New Labour governments placed the onus on museums to improve physical and intellectual access to museum collections. The growing professionalisation of museum practice – also addressed in that chapter – had also heightened awareness of unused and underused collections. In keeping with those shifts, these initiatives did not focus on continuity of practice, but, instead, capitalized on what Eilean Hooper-

Greenhill has christened the object's "inter-artefactual" capacity to translate their archetypes for present-day audiences.³⁰⁷

As somebody whose work is directly informed by the study of the historical, Philip Eglin necessarily, interprets other objects in the process of creating his own. He has, unsurprisingly, embraced these opportunities, participating in numerous exhibitions that foregrounded the influence that museum collections had on his practice.³⁰⁸ For example, in 2001, he produced a series of works inspired by objects he had seen illustrated in the V&A publication *Northern Gothic Sculpture 1200-1450*.³⁰⁹ Conducting close studies of the original objects, Eglin developed his ideas through sketches, focusing on certain areas, such as the roughly hewn backs, which were intended to be hidden in architectural niches – a characteristic that had parallels with the flatback figures from Staffordshire, which were another influence on his formal vocabulary. Finally, in an exhibition at the V&A in 2001, he juxtaposed his finished works – a series of Madonnas – with a selection of medieval woodcarvings from the museum's collections.

Eglin's works such as *Microwave Oven-Safe Madonna* (2001) – his interpretation of a seated virgin in the V&A's collection, merged the sacred and temporally remote with the domestic and familiar [fig.2]. Incorporating elements cast from food packaging and sat atop a paper bag, his Madonna has the vestiges of a foot attached to her lap. Highlighting the fragment with gilding, Eglin gestured to the Japanese process of kintsugi, whereby broken pottery is repaired with lacquer and precious metal dust, embracing that damage as part of the object's life story, rather than something to conceal. Whilst the fragmentary foot mimicked the carving she was modelled on, from

307 Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2002), 116

308 Other collections-based projects that Eglin has participated in include *A Staffordshire Tradition*, South Bank Centre, London and Oxford Gallery, Oxford (1991); *Selection from the Collection*, Ipswich Museum (1996) and *Mixed Marriage (s)*, Blackwell – The Arts and Crafts House, Bowness-on-Windemere, (2011).

309 Paul Williamson, *Northern Gothic Sculpture 1200-1450* (London: V&A Publications, 1988).

which the figure of Christ had broken away, it also imbued the work with a melancholy air of loss.

Hooper-Greenhill has forwarded the idea that people reach understandings by matching what they are experiencing to things they have already experienced: they are Rancière's emancipated spectators.³¹⁰ Drawing on Gadamer's hermeneutic theory, she has argued "Meaning is to be found neither wholly in the object nor wholly in the viewer. Meaning is dialogic – a dialogue between viewer and object."³¹¹ As visitors to the V&A moved from Eglin's work to its archetype – from the iconic to the everyday – his gilded detailing pointed visitors towards the jagged scar left when the Madonna's child sheared away from her. Shifting their focus from the object's status as a museum artifact to the Madonna's status as a mother and the void created by the loss of her child, Eglin united the two works and, in the process, the past and present. In doing so, albeit inadvertently, it also demonstrated that ceramists could "speak for themselves" through gestures of showing, without having to talk about medium.

In the catalogue for another of Eglin's collections-based projects *Borrowings* (2007) critic John Christian proposed that artists can use the past to produce work that is of their own time, claiming "...this new creation or 'link' as Cezanne called it, can also be a profound meditation on its antecedents."³¹² However, although engagement with historical forms is an integral part of some ceramists' practices, for others, such as Katherine Morling, the invitation to create the 'link,' between past and present has demanded new ways of working and raised questions about authorship.³¹³ When Morling was invited to produce a work in response to the Staffordshire Hoard she initially resisted. The commission was not driven by a pre-existing affinity between the artist and

310 Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Culture*, 116-119.

311 Ibid., 117

312 John Christian, "Redeeming the Poppadum," in Nottingham City Museums and Galleries, *Borrowings* (Nottingham: Nottingham City Museums & Galleries, 2003), 8.

313 John Christian, "Nice Pair of Jugs," (London: Marsden Woo Gallery, 2013). Christian has described Eglin as "the most museum conscious of artists."

the project. Instead, it was motivated by the museum's preference for commissioning a ceramist – due to Stoke-on-Trent's industrial heritage – and positive visitor reactions to a previous display of Morling's work at the museum. However, at that date Morling's art-oriented work had been driven by personal narrative and although the brief for the Hoard project was open, the request for a 'response to' demanded that she interpret the material in some way.³¹⁴ Nonetheless, despite the lack of personal connection with the subject – the largest hoard of Anglo-Saxon gold ever found – the fact that little was known about its historical origins offered a degree of freedom. As Morling was wondering how to interpret it, museum curators, archaeologists and members of the public were doing the same. She, therefore, took the sense of the unknown as the starting point for her work.

Morling confessed that she was somewhat underwhelmed by the Hoard, which is largely comprised of tiny fragments of precious metal and enamel that were, long ago, detached from the armour and weaponry they once adorned. Furthermore, as a female and a pacifist, she was little enthused by its association with masculinity and war.³¹⁵ Yet, when she began to scrutinise the individual objects she noticed the intricate animal motifs in the Hoard instead and began to ponder their significance. The result was a series of ten sculptures, which were based on those animals and which embody the attributes that she felt the warriors would want to take into battle with them. They include a horse, symbolising speed, and an all-seeing four-headed eagle as well as a regal looking two-headed fish and a sea horse relaxing in an armchair [fig. 3].

314 Conversely, she did not express worries about ownership when her designs for plates and a coffee cup and saucer were chosen for production in a Stoke-on-Trent factory as part of a partnership between Waddesdon Manor and the Innovation RCA initiative in 2007 when she was a student. Decorative arts students from the RCA have visited Waddesdon Manor every year since 2007 and produced giftware inspired by their visit. A selection of these works is then sold in the National Trust Property's shop. However, the link between the commission and the output was apparent from the outset – it was a commercial venture.

315 Katherine Morling, in discussion with author, January 30, 2013. This narrative, which Morling relayed to me in a discussion about the work, conflicts with that in the official booklet about the exhibition. She explained that she felt she should, initially, have been overawed and so stated that she was so not to disappoint.

In his 1990 essay *Resonance and Wonder*, Stephen Greenblatt used the two categories in his title to outline two approaches to displaying art. Eglin's work is characteristic of the first – the ability that objects have to connect past circumstances and present, creating a sense of recognition in the spectator. Such concerns have also constituted the dominant focus of museological practice since the early 1980s and are the more typical focus of artist commissions. However, with the air of mystery surrounding the Hoard, Morling's interpretative task was perhaps closer to the latter. Like those seventeenth-century collectors who speculated that the mysterious objects with which they filled their cabinets of curiosity might be mermaids' hands, dragon's eggs and unicorn horns, much was left to her imagination.³¹⁶ Nevertheless, as she did so, she shaped the project so that it fitted with her practice. The figures became actors in a script about the futility of war.

Morling also made a series of drawings of her figures. These formed the basis of a film, which she commissioned animator Quinton Winters to make.³¹⁷ Beginning with the archaeologist, who unearthed the Hoard and, thus, liberated the creatures and their narratives from their tombs, her interpretation ends with an image of the god-like entities returning to the spirit world to survey the mortals below in their stupidity. Bringing her story about the characters' emergence from the spirit world and entrance into the earth world to life brought another layer of meaning to the works. For those museum visitors, who, like her, were initially bemused by the Hoard, it also provided a cue for closer, and equally personal, investigation.

The gesture of showing that Morling was involved in was catalysed by the Cultural Olympiad – a four-year Arts Council campaign, which funded a programme of cultural events to coincide with the London 2012 Olympic

³¹⁶ Ken Arnold, *Cabinets for the Curious: Looking back at Early English Museums*, (Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate, 2006); Arthur MacGregor, *Tradescant's Rarities: Essays on the Foundation of the Ashmolean Museum, 1683, with a Catalogue of the Surviving Early Collections* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983).

³¹⁷ Quinton Winters, "Morling and the Hoard," Youtube video, 2:48, posted by "KMorling ceramics," January 18, 2013 (2013) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mBPEWv5H4cE>

Games. With the stated aims that included showcasing UK “excellence,” promoting the creative industries and encouraging cultural tourism, it might be seen to instrumentalise artists in order to showcase Britain to the world.³¹⁸ However, it also helped Morling to develop her practice, teaching her that she could work with other people’s beginnings and still produce a work of which she had ownership.³¹⁹ In addition, the financial support that it provided enabled her to hire sculptors who could help her to work on a more ambitious scale. Whilst she had previously felt uneasy about devolving physical production to others, she was able to settle on an approach that helped her to realise her ideas, but with which she felt comfortable.³²⁰ Moreover, her own gesture of showing not only brought the project back into line with her own focus on the personal, but it also situated her work within the broader, cross-disciplinary context of recent artist-museum collaborations.

3. Critique and intervention

Since the early 1990s, such collaborations have become a regular feature of museum programmes in Britain. They build upon the legacy of the critical artistic practices that emerged in the 1960s and ‘70s and which have been discussed under the banner of institutional critique. As addressed in previous chapters, many of these practices proceeded from the fact that the museum’s apparent neutrality naturalises the presentation of art through a singular cultural and geographical viewpoint, one that accords with the dominant bourgeois ideology.³²¹ Deconstructing the notion that artworks are autonomous by exposing the ways in which the category of art is constructed through (amongst other things) gestures of showing, these new perspectives on art also

318 Arts Council England, *Reflections on the Cultural Olympiad and London 2012 Festival* (London: Arts Council England and LOCOG, 2013).

319 Katherine Morling, in discussion with author, January 30, 2013.

320 Ibid.

321 Daniel Buren, “The Function of the Museum,” 105.

challenged the exclusion of particular media and techniques from the histories of art. Yet despite the opportunities these shifts opened up for those who were already working in traditional craft media there is little evidence of their impact on ceramic practice in Britain at that time. However, Paul Astbury's *Trash Monument to Poor Craftsmanship and Poor Art* (1974) was a rare, and telling, exception to that rule. Taking up one wall of the CAC's Waterloo Place gallery, the work [fig. 4] formed a curious counterpart to the Committee's *Christmas Fare*, exhibition, which occupied the building at the same time and which, according to *Art & Antiques* contained "ceramic pies and felt bananas."³²²

Astbury trained as a ceramist and his work in the 1970s involved press moulded objects that drew on imagery of popular culture and referenced the archaeological. He was one of three artists (along with silversmith Michael Rowe and bookbinder Faith Shannon) whose work in other media (in Astbury's case, paintings) formed the focus of the CAC's first exhibition at the same gallery in 1973 and which had momentarily suggested that the Committee might take a more expansive view of the notion of craft.³²³ Nevertheless, when commissioned to produce a work for the *Christmas Fare*, he used the opportunity to criticise the studio pottery establishment and the artworld's attitude to those with medium-specific training.

His mixed-media pop-art-inspired wall installation was comprised of some twenty-seven square panels in a format that recalled both comic strips and board games. Indeed, one of the panels contained a painted game of "art and ladders," in which artists were invited to try their talent. There were also squares devoted to the "art inspector," which took the form of a robot and a sculpture of a person atop a ladder with their head in "the art vault." However, his sarcastic swipe at the crafts was no less scathing and came via a square that contained a pot on a plinth with a speech bubble declaring "I am a talking pot" and another showing a pair of clasped hands with the caption "the hands."

³²² *Art & Antiques*, December 7, 1974, 10.

³²³ Crafts, "Astbury, Shannon, Rowe," *Crafts*, no. 4 (1973): 20.

Whilst these targeted the dominant models of ceramic practice at the time – the first referencing Coper and the second, craft potters such as Leach and Cardew, a third square depicted a potter struggling to contain a pot, which was spiralling away from him and which may have alluded to the difficulty of containing ceramic practice. Rather than just speaking, Astbury's work shouted out loud; its title echoing both the types of accusation levelled at trained ceramists who were trying to break into the artworld at that time and the critical voices of the craft potters who privileged manual skill over concept.

Not materially ceramic, Astbury's work was certainly a ceramist's critique, although it was perhaps more akin to a student protest than it was to the critical artistic practices of his fine art contemporaries. Whilst Buren was arguing that artists should expose the frameworks that shaped the reading of their work, it could be argued that studio ceramic practice was not sufficiently institutionalised at that point for this to be an effective strategy.³²⁴ It had only just begun to enter museums and they did not serve as its hegemonic face. Furthermore, the CAC had just been founded and supported an eclectic range of practices at the time. Whilst the CPA, the British Crafts Centre and private galleries such as Primavera and The Oxford Gallery were the main agencies of consecration for ceramics practice, they did not represent a united front either. In fact, in the early 1970s they, too, were attempting to locate work such as Astbury's, as evidenced in the letters pages of *Ceramic Review*, which were filled with debate about membership policies and the line between pottery and sculpture.

In seizing the opportunity provided by the CAC, with its commitment to craft media, Astbury highlighted his true problem. If he wished to be taken seriously as a fine artist, his statement needed to be visible within that field. Brian O'Doherty (1977) has argued that in the 1970s radicalism in art turned away from the critique of the autonomous art object towards critiquing and

324 Daniel Buren, "The Function of the Museum," 102-106.

offering alternatives to the structures that constituted it as art.³²⁵ This situation might be regarded as an opportunity for ceramic practitioners to argue for recognition within the category of art, as other marginalised constituencies did. However, Astbury's works at that point were closer in approach to those that Eduardo Paolozzi, (his former tutor at the RCA) had made in the 1950s than they were to those of contemporary British sculptors. For example, *Space Ship Derelict* (1974) – a press moulded form cast from children's toys and purposely aged so that it might be taken as a curious archaeological artefact – shared the formal vocabulary of Paolozzi's *Cyclops* (1957), which was cast from industrial machine parts and intended as a comment on man's condition in the nuclear age [figs. 5 & 6]. Yet, it was new to ceramic practice and the CAC purchased it in 1974. As he stood at this crossroads in his practice, it could be argued that the CAC encouraged him (along with other artists, who were testing the broader applications of clay and ceramic process) to frame his work as crafts when his ambitions lay elsewhere. By embracing this opportunity he was left venting his anger at an artworld that was unlikely to see his protest, but he was also spared the rigors of its criticism.

Whilst this ambiguity was characteristic of the limbo that art-oriented ceramic practitioners found themselves in during the 1970s, in the 1980s and early '90s, efforts to argue for the art status of some areas of ceramic practice centred on typical modernist white cube galleries. As discussed in chapters four and six, artists such as Andrew Lord and Jacqueline Poncelet and exhibitions such as *The Raw and the Cooked* (1994) did not argue against the power that such spaces had to frame some works as art and exclude others. Rather, they embraced their aestheticizing powers, using them to argue that ceramic works could fulfil the criteria of the autonomous art object.

Glen R Brown has proposed that: "ceramics as a field wishes to become art but at the same time recognises the self-destructive impulse within that wish

325 Brian O' Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, California: University of California Press, 1976, 77.

and resists any specific measures that might go too far toward actualising it.”³²⁶ This internal conflict between the wish for recognition and the fear of absorption may explain why the object itself remained the focus until the late 1990s when, as discussed in chapter one, its separatist position was becoming increasingly untenable. Instead, the alternatives that were offered were physically and ideologically different to the dominant studio pottery model. Nevertheless, a number of non-ceramists demonstrated how engaging with the museum as medium could highlight the polysemantic properties of ceramic objects. All five artists in *Palaces of Culture* (1987), an exhibition at Stoke-on-Trent Museum, engaged with ceramics in some way. The exhibition proceeded from the premise that:

History is the mythic story of those invested with power who write their own stories for posterity and preservation. Social processes and the will of the majority, most pertinently women of whatever culture, remain virtually unrecorded. The authenticity of such historical objects gathered together helps to give credibility to the view of history as presented by curators of museums.³²⁷

It sought to expose the inherent biases of those mythic stories and the alternative narratives that their supposed neutrality masked. For one participating artist, Jo Stockham, the exhibition was a chance to “decompartmentalise museums, where disciplines such as social history and ceramics are separated, obscuring their intermeshing and interdependency.”³²⁸ Coating the inside of a museum case with wet clay, she frustrated attempts to obtain a clear view of the objects inside, drawing parallels with the museum’s displays, which espoused visibility, yet concealed less palatable histories. She also finger-painted a quote that referenced the toxic effects of lead glazes on

326 Glen R Brown, “Multiplicity, Ambivalence and Ceramic Installation Art,” *Ceramics, Art and Perception*, no. 70, (2003): 5.

327 Graham Evans, “The Great British Museum,” in *Palaces of Culture: The Great Museum Exhibition* (Stoke on Trent: Stoke on Trent City Museum and Art Gallery, 1987), 5.

328 Emma Dexter, “Jo Stockham,” in *Palaces of Culture. The Great Museum Exhibition*, 18.

Stockham also crafted human organs from lead, coal and rotten wood and placed them inside the case, referencing the toxic effects of lead glazes and the factory environment.

workers' health into the clay, declaring: "the masters don't tell us what's in it" [fig. 7].³²⁹ Giving voice to those whose labour and suffering lay behind ceramic objects like those in the museum, Stockham exposed the impossibility of the *Neutral History* she took as her title and which many museums still purported to offer.

Hooper-Greenhill later used Stockham's work and others in *Palaces of Culture* to support her argument that increasing the number of texts available in museums and diversifying their authorial base would "break down the curatorial monopoly of the description of experience and will work towards the democratisation of the museum as a social institution."³³⁰ This was a demand that museums were already trying to fulfill at the time she was writing and artists would be increasingly used as a means of achieving this. However, the works in *Palaces of Culture* also demonstrated that the creation of alternative narratives could expand the discourse around ceramics. As Hooper-Greenhill observed, there is nothing inherently wrong with the way in which ceramics are traditionally displayed according to style, decoration or technique, issues of exclusion arise when objects are only displayed and discussed in one way.³³¹ These issues are as applicable to the institutions that constructed the hegemonic models of 'ceramics' as to the museum.

Despite the precedent set by Stockham and her fellow exhibitors, it was another decade before ceramic practitioners such as De Waal began to produce works that conducted "an epistemological critique of museological practices."³³² As critics such as Clare Robins have observed, such approaches had become part of the interpretative arsenal of the museum by this date. In her recent book on intervention Robins dates this transition to the 1990s and 2000s, although

329 Stockham took this quote from Charles Shaw, *When I Was a Child – A First Hand Account of Life as a Child Worker in the North Staffordshire Potteries in the 1840s* (Wakefield: SR publishers, 1969).

330 Eilean Hooper Greenhill, "Languages and Texts," in *Museums and their Visitors* (London: Routledge, 1994), 118.

331 Ibid.

332 Clare Robins, *Curious Lessons in the Museum: The Pedagogic Potential of Artists Interventions* (London: Ashgate, 2013), 8.

Palaces of Culture provides a precedent that is particularly relevant for the ceramic field.³³³ The growing concern with alternative voices and objects' histories in the museum reflected the impact of anthropological theories such as Arjun Appadurai's *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (1986), which addressed the value of objects beyond the economic sphere.³³⁴ Similarly, albeit later, as Martina Margetts has observed, many "craft practitioners seemed to distance themselves from the history of decorative arts, only later finding accommodation within anthropology's world of agency and material culture."³³⁵

The works in *Acknowledged Sources* (2001) were perhaps the first interventions within museum collections to receive wider coverage in ceramics and crafts-centred publications. The three-site exhibition, which included work by two ceramists, was afforded a sizeable review in *Crafts* (2002). It also formed the centrepiece of Simon Olding's (2003) article *Museum Pieces*, which addressed exhibitions in which artists used craft media to respond to architecture and historical artefacts.³³⁶

Acknowledged Sources followed the revisionist pattern set by projects such as *Palaces of Culture* and Chris Dorsett's experimental artist commissions at Oxford's Pitt Rivers Museum in the 1990s. Reflecting the continued impact that post-colonial theory exerted on museological practice, it aimed to address the cross-cultural influences on artists in Britain. Working at the Russell-Cotes Museum and Art Gallery in Bournemouth, Kenyan-born British potter Magdalena Odundo placed her pots alongside African objects from the collections, whose makers were unknown. In making that juxtaposition, she created what Homi K. Bhabha has labelled a "third space of enunciation," highlighting the artificial homogeneity of categorisations such as British and

333 Ibid., 1.

334 Arjun Appadurai, ed. *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

335 Martina Margetts, 'From Leach to Etsy,' in *Collect 2011* (London: Crafts Council), 24.

336 Simon Olding, "Museum Pieces," *Crafts*, no.181 (2003): 52.

African and the role that museums played in naturalising them.³³⁷ Inviting visitors to either relate or distinguish her pots from those from within the collection, she also demonstrated how museum interpretation could structure our readings of an object's cultural and artistic value. Denied the agency of authorship, those who made the African pots were also denied specificity and were more readily objectified.

Another part of the museum was rich with the trappings of another aspect of colonialism – Monarchism. Inspired by a collection of medallions representing Queen Victoria's family tree, Odundo began to consider the family histories of others who had been affected by colonialism. Transfer-printing her own family portraits on a readymade dinner service, she then displayed them on a table within the gallery's period dining room [fig. 8]. Facing a painting of Queen Victoria's family, the unexpected faces gazing back from the familiar commemorative dinner service worked in dialogue with the royal portrait to provide an alternative family portrait, which contrasted the personal with the public, as well as questioning whose histories are deemed worthy of public commemoration.³³⁸

Although drawn to the displays of craft objects and ceramics, Odundo engaged with the objects' histories to create works that encouraged visitors to reassess simplistic notions of self/other. Rather than claiming access to alterity on the grounds of her ethnicity she challenged the dichotomous notions of otherness upon which that model is founded. She did this through a combination of concept and technical artistic skills, with each playing their part in the work's reception. The result was a work that highlighted the relations of power that allow one perspective to dominate readings of objects, including the categorisation ceramics.

Although *Acknowledged Sources* explicitly challenged simplistic modes of characterisation, Olding described it as part of a "new genre of craft exhibition,"

337 Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 37.

338 Diverging from Odundo's recognized practice, the use of ready-mades moved the project beyond the rearrangement of pre-existing works.

which had developed in recent years.³³⁹ Of course, the approach was neither new, nor specific to the crafts. It might be argued that the combination of established names such as Odundo, and the high-profile of related projects such as De Waal's *Modern Home* (1999), the Belsay Hall commissions (from 1996) and Hans Haacke's *Give and Take* (2001), which spanned the V&A and Serpentine Gallery, had made discussion unavoidable. However, efforts to locate De Waal's work, in particular, might be seen to accelerate the institutionalisation of such works as distinct facets of ceramic practice.³⁴⁰

In the catalogue for *Modern Home: An Intervention by Edmund de Waal* at High Cross House in Devon (1999) curator Mike Tooby introduced the term 'intervention' into mainstream ceramic discourse. In this project, de Waal sought to respond to the historic house museum as space and place with a phenomenological concern for how the visitor oriented themselves around the building and his work, describing it as "a kind of very personal conversation with iconic modernism about pots and where they belong,"³⁴¹ A number of other works such as his installation in *Ceramic Rooms* (2002) at the Geffrye Museum also engaged with ideas around museum display, but *Arcanum: Mapping 18th Century Porcelain* (2005) is perhaps his most explicit intervention within a permanent museum collection.

Arcanum centred on the De Winton collection of porcelain, which was bequeathed to the National Museum of Wales in 1917 and 1929. A new gallery was built around it with a layout that replicated De Winton's own taxonomies, but this was replaced by the museum's own subdivisions in the 1950s. The collection, which comprised over 2,000 items, was gradually split up and the display left to stagnate as porcelain collecting fell out of fashion. In the late 1990s curators moved to remedy this and De Waal, who sat on the National

339 Simon Olding, "Museum Pieces," *Crafts*, no.181 (2003): 52.

340 De Waal was a Trustee of the Crafts Study Centre, from 2000 until 2010, where Olding worked and his interest in this type of practice may have heightened Olding's awareness of it.

341 Edmund de Waal and Mike Tooby, *Modern Home: An Intervention by Edmund de Waal at High Cross House* (Totnes: Dartington Hall Trust, 2009), 11.

Museum of Wales's Art Advisory Committee from 2000, was heavily involved in the redisplay plans.

Appraising the existing ceramics displays more broadly, De Waal and Andrew Renton, the museum's Head of Applied Art identified numerous issues, from overcrowded displays to over and under-interpretation. Of particular concern was the predominance of the connoisseurial approach to the applied arts and its contrast with the aesthetic approach to the display of fine art: a comparison that might be seen to signal De Waal's ambitions for his work.³⁴² The duo's proposal that demonstrating applied art objects were beautiful as individual objects was "the best way to develop new potential audiences," and that "at the moment the displays best serve those who come here to have their existing knowledge reaffirmed,"³⁴³ also reflected the rhetoric of government-run funding bodies, although the project was funded by charitable body Colwinston Trust.

These discussions eventually led to *Arcanum: Mapping Eighteenth-Century Porcelain* (2004) – a project in which De Waal used curatorial practice as a conceptual tool in order to reveal alternative narratives about the collection and he also produced new works in response to it. De Waal combined different methods of display: open displays, groupings based on inherited and invented taxonomical categories and massed objects intended to reference both the eighteenth-century porzellankammer and the compilation techniques of collectors. Rather than solely aestheticising the objects as he and Renton's had early discussed, he offered multiple approaches to display for comparison, asking the visitor to consider their impact on the reading of the work. By doing so, he concretised Hooper-Greenhill's argument about the limitations of single-focus approaches to display.³⁴⁴

342 Edmund De Waal and Andrew Renton, Notes on the display of applied art at the National Museum and Art Gallery, Cardiff, October 11, 2000, *Arcanum*, National Museum of Wales archive.

343 Ibid.

344 Eilean Hooper Greenhill, "Languages and Texts," in *Museums and their Visitors*, 118.

In addition to these re-displays, De Waal presented his own trademark white porcelain cylinders in various configurations, which worked in dialogue with displays from the collection. In one such configuration, he arrayed his vessels across an open plinth and objects from the De Winton collection across another [fig. 9]. The layout reflected a table, set with a white tablecloth, yet in his catalogue essay, De Waal argued, “This is not a faux dinner service, a mocked up, polished dinner party made of complete sets and suites of work. It is porcelain to gawp at.”³⁴⁵ It is an assertion that, when read in relation to his earlier discussion about the fine art connotations of display, might be regarded as an attempt to shift his own work into that category.

De Waal’s essay described the fall from grace of the porcelain collection as an issue to be redressed: a decline that a carefully chosen essay by another contributor, Sebastian Kuhn, Director of the European ceramics department at Sotheby’s auction house, chronicled. Detailing how existing approaches to porcelain display had effaced its princely role in the eighteenth-century, when utilitarian forms were acquired for the sole purpose of display, the text created the impression that De Waal’s display was simply restoring porcelain to its rightful (and elevated) place.

This framing has affinities with a model of practice that Hal Foster has suggested mobilises “the artist as ethnographer.”³⁴⁶ It is an approach that pivots on the notion that artists belonging to subcultural or marginalised groups can challenge dominant narratives and achieve political transformation. The artist is afforded authenticity and the capacity to speak for others according to the degree to which their own story correlates with that of those they represent. Identifying the misrepresentation of porcelain objects in the museum as an inequity to be exposed and aligning his practice with that of eighteenth-century

345 Edmund de Waal, “Arcanum: Mapping Eighteenth-Century Porcelain,” in Mike Tooby, Edmund De Waal, Sebastian Kuhn et al, *Arcanum: Mapping Eighteenth-Century Porcelain: Edmund de Waal*, (Cardiff: National Museum of Wales: 2005), 4-11.

346 Hal Foster, “The Artist as Ethnographer,” in *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, Mass; London: MIT Press, 1996).

porcelain makers, De Waal became their mouthpiece. Whilst in his paper *Not in Ideas, but in Things*, (1999), which was addressed earlier, De Waal urged potters to “speak for themselves,” to prevent others (including curators) from doing so in their place, with *Arcanum* he stepped into the curator’s role, speaking for others and creating a desirable lineage for his own work in the process³⁴⁷.

Arcanum: Mapping Eighteenth-Century Porcelain, thus, combined two incompatible approaches to museum intervention: the dialogic and the critical-authorial. De Waal explicitly declared that the exhibition represented an individual approach to the many alternative histories of ceramics, writing about overlap, generative stories, of contradiction and, above all, the personal.³⁴⁸ Referencing mapping, the title suggested that the exhibition was what Deleuze and Guattari describe as “rhizomatic,” an image of thought where:

The map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group, or social formation. It can be drawn on a wall, conceived of as a work of art, constructed as a political action or as a meditation.³⁴⁹

However, whilst De Waal applied this curatorial approach to the collections, his own minimalistic white forms were displayed in ways that invited aesthetic, rather than narrative, interpretation. Furthermore, the essays in the accompanying catalogue created a clear, and prestigious, context for his work.³⁵⁰ In addition to the texts by De Waal and Kuhn, the publication included an introduction by the museum’s Director, Mike Tooby, who had previously led initiatives to improve ceramics display at Tate St Ives, an essay by Putnam, who situated De Waal’s work within the history of institutional critique in fine art and – mirroring the turn towards discursive approaches in fine art - a

347 This contrasted with the approach Odundo took to *Acknowledged Sources*, in which she adopted a model that foregrounded hybridity, rather than dichotomous models that reinforce the distinction between insider/outsider.

348 Edmund de Waal, “*Arcanum: Mapping Eighteenth-Century Porcelain*,” 4-11.

349 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, tr. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 12.

350 Mike Tooby, Edmund De Waal, Sebastian Kuhn et al., eds, *Arcanum: Mapping Eighteenth-Century Porcelain: Edmund de Waal* (Cardiff: National Museum of Wales, 2005).

discussion between progressive craft theorist Jorunn Veiteberg and art historian Bodil Busk Larsen.

4. Fluid identities

Art Historian John Roberts has argued that since the 1960s:

Artists may continue to work as painters, photographers, and sculptors, but painting, photography and sculpture are not in themselves privileged sites of expression and meaning for the artist. Rather, specific media are staging areas for the warping and weaving of the process of semiosis across forms, genres and non-artistic disciplines.³⁵¹

Since the 1990s, this has also been true of curatorial practice, which has been addressed as a medium in its own right.³⁵² However, ceramics was and is still a privileged site of expression and meaning for many artists. As a result of this, re-imagining it as a “staging ground,” which was open to all problematized their identity. To some degree, ceramists’ focus on object making and skill, which largely continued throughout the ‘70s and ‘80s, allowed them to sidestep the repercussions that this shift might have for them. Nevertheless, as is evident in the examples above, this did not prevent other creative producers from using ceramic objects, techniques and materials within their works. Ceramic objects sat at the heart of *Arcanum*: De Waal may have exploited the discursive potential of the exhibition as medium, but he did so in order to re-frame porcelain. By contrast, others who have embraced the ambiguities of contemporary production have shifted the focus from what ceramics *is* to what it can *do*.

The first discussion of intervention in *Ceramic Review* came a full decade before *Arcanum* in a review of Marcus Thomas’s work at Aberystwyth

351 John Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and De-skilling in Art After the Ready-made* (London and New York: Verso), 14.

352 Paul O’ Neill, “Curating as a Medium of Artistic Practice: The Convergence of Art and Curatorial Practice since the 1990s,” in *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2012), 90-91.

University (1995).³⁵³ The previous year, Thomas's *Close Relations* had won the gold medal for craft at the National Eisteddfod and he was, therefore, invited to reconfigure it for the University's ceramics gallery. For the original installation, Thomas had slip-cast both clay and non-clay domestic objects, which had personal resonance for him and which were redolent of his Welsh upbringing, placing them in configurations that were suggestive of male/female stereotypes, which referenced his religious upbringing and were redolent of domesticity.

The original work was too large to fit into the ceramics gallery in its entirety, so Thomas selected individual components from it.³⁵⁴ Working with students from the university, he arranged them to create a dialogue with the historical objects in the ceramics gallery, also incorporating objects from the social history collections of Ceredigion Museum. The original installation took the concept of 'aelwyd' – a Welsh word, which means "from the hearth," and is connotative of the home, domesticity and familial relations. Continuing that theme, he placed one of his Staffordshire dogs atop a wooden chair. Rather than taking its place in the collection of objects arrayed throughout the gallery it became part of a dispersed collection of real dogs – each carried in a visitor's mind. The dog conversed with chairs in the other three corners of the gallery – two of Thomas's and another from the collection. Another of Thomas's chairs had a Victorian slip cast lion upon it: a masculine and aggressive presence, which challenged the cosy domesticity of its canine counterpart. Thomas reinforced this sense of masculine dominance by arranging a group of his own slip-cast lions, so that they encircled a nineteenth-century jug with a lion shaped handle and carrying an image of a soldier. He also included a wall of jelly moulds. A number of these were decorated with prints of preachers, like the walls of church Sunday schools. In combination, the two forms were

353 Fennah Davies, "Marcus Thomas – A Sense of Place," *Ceramic Review*, no. 153 (1995): 58.

354 Moira Vincentelli, "Aspiration and Reality – Working with Artists at the Ceramic Collection, Aberystwyth," (paper presented at the conference The Go-Between, National Museum of Wales, Cardiff, September 2009).

evocative of two poles of childhood experience – the rigor of religious instruction and the indiscipline of the birthday party [fig. 10].

As well as expanding upon the dialogues in Thomas's original work and giving the objects in the museum a new resonance, the exhibition highlighted the complex nature of the values we place on (and the identities we give to) objects. He used slip-casting – a technique long associated with industrial mass production – to make replicas of the mass-produced objects. He also created new moulds from historic moulds, which were printed with images that had once circulated as paper prints. These acts of doubling exposed the instability of concepts such as originality and authenticity. Whilst replicas have traditionally held less cultural capital than original models, many of the objects that Thomas cast had been collected for their social history value. They were, therefore, afforded less cultural capital than art: the category in which the exhibition located Thomas's copies.

Within the context of the exhibition, ceramic objects acquired for their social history credentials became ready-mades, ceramic objects made by an artist performed social history, and the symbolism of the individual objects worked in tension with the overarching narrative of the exhibition. Thomas was artist, curator, historian, teacher and collaborator. Nevertheless, although the project received a full-page of coverage in *Ceramic Review*, as an isolated example of intervention produced by an artist who admitted he had no affinity to medium, it had a negligible impact on the discourse around ceramics.³⁵⁵

Perhaps the most prominent of those who have embraced these opportunities is Grayson Perry. An artist who exploits the narrative potential of objects and the exhibition format, museums have provided the perfect platform, subject and material for his work.³⁵⁶ With his 2003 Turner Prize win claimed as

355 Fennah Davies, "Marcus Thomas – A Sense of Place," 58.

356 Exhibitions note discussed here include such as *Unpopular Culture*, which was shown at the De La Warr Pavillion in 2008 and then toured, and *The Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman* (2011) at the British Museum and *Who are You?* at the National Portrait Gallery (2014).

a marker of the ascendancy of ceramics in the artworld and his pottery skills simultaneously dismissed as mediocre, Perry is a controversial figure in the discourse around ceramics.³⁵⁷ Speaking at the 2001 Arts Council Conference *From Material Things: Art and Artefact in the 21st Century* he declared “I still regard myself as a conceptual artist masquerading as a craftsman, but since winning Turner I’ve become the poster boy/girl for crafts.”³⁵⁸ Nonetheless, clay is one of his main vehicles and he frequently exploits the connotative potential of pottery as a vehicle through which to explore wider social and cultural issues.

In 2002, nurturing this (at that point, nascent) interest Jeremy Webster, Senior Keeper of The Collection, Lincoln, invited Perry to make an exhibition that drew on the museum’s under-used reserve collections: the result was *The Charms of Lincolnshire* (2006).³⁵⁹ Webster’s invitation came at a point when the county’s archaeological collections were awaiting installation in a new purpose-built museum, which opened in 2005. It, thus, reflected the growing emphasis on the better use of and public access to stored collections within the museum sector at that time. As set out in the report *Collections for People: Museums’ Stored Collections as a Public Resource* (2008) the sometimes indiscriminate accumulation of objects in the latter half of the twentieth century had left many British museums with stores full of objects that were never used.³⁶⁰ Alert to this issue, the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) had proposed a set of standards for access to collections in the policy document *Museums for the Many*

357 David Watson and Molly Williams, “Letters,” *Ceramic Review*, no. 114 (1988): 5. The letters page of this 1988 issue of *Ceramic Review* featured two typical reactions to Perry’s work: Watson praised it, suggesting ceramicists needed to embrace such work or otherwise find themselves “in an ivory tower of our [their] making,” whereas Williams complained that it was “appallingly badly made.”

358 Grayson Perry, “Amateurism, Art and Absorption,” *Crafts*, no. 214 (2008): 53-55.

359 The Collection is the combined name for Lincolnshire archaeology museum and the Usher Art Gallery.

360 Suzanne Keene, ed. *Collections for people: museums’ stored collections as a public resource* (London: UCL Institute of Archaeology, 2008).

(1999).³⁶¹ Stressing that stored collections should be accessible to the wider public, rather than just scholars and researchers, this shift in emphasis may have motivated many of the other projects discussed in this chapter.³⁶²

An imaginary Victorian woman, facing a physical and psychological struggle to survive and grieving for her lost children formed the conduit for Perry's ideas. He described the show as "a poem written with objects," and placed a hearse from the museum collection in the middle of the gallery, installing death at the heart of the world he created. He also created an elaborately decorated cast iron coffin, titled *Angel of the South*, in order to prompt comparisons with *Angel of the North* - Gormley's monument to the people of Gateshead [fig. 11]. Whilst Gormley's towering figure dominates the landscape with its outstretched arms, the figure on the coffin took the horizontal form of another typical monument with arms crossed over its chest. And the ceramic objects? They ranged from a slipware plate, which was decorated with motifs typical of its archetypes but labeled "Ikea" to align it with contemporary domestic wares, to a rabbit with the handwritten phrase "God please keep my children safe," repeated across its surface. Highlighting the power that we continue to invest in objects, it might have been a historic totem or a contemporary lucky charm.

Free from the professional curator's commitment to provenance and documentary evidence, in many ways, Perry's approach solved one of the key issues that those looking to interpret stored collections faced. Whilst Pearce has elucidated that:

Souvenirs are intrinsic parts of a past experience, but because they, like the human actors in the experience, possess the survival power of materiality not shared by words, sights or the other elements of

361 DCMS, *Museums for the many: Standards for museums and galleries to use when developing access policies* (London: DCMS, 1999).

362 Adherence to those standards was also rewarded with funding through Museums Association initiatives such as Collections for the Future (2005) and Effective Collections (2007) as well as a number of Renaissance in the Regions projects, which supported collections reviews. See, for example, Renaissance North West, *Revealing Collections: Regionally Dispersed Collections in the North West* (Manchester: Renaissance Northwest, 2011).

experience, they alone have the power to carry the past into the present.³⁶³

She has also highlighted the difficulty of displaying such objects when they are detached from those whose lives they were integrated into. However, Perry was undeterred by concerns about the actual lives of the objects, but drew upon their evocative power to address universal themes. In doing so, he raised a question about the stories told in museums: is a resonant exhibition, which uses objects to illustrate a fictional narrative any less valid than one that uses them to tell one that is factual, but which fails to connect with visitors?

Exhibited without descriptive labels, Webster claimed:

The artefacts are deliberately displayed as contemporary art objects. They have been given space and are displayed on white plinths with unfussy labels. In taking this approach Grayson removes them from their previous museum context and places them on an equal footing with his own work.³⁶⁴

Yet, it might, instead, be argued that he highlighted the unstable identity of the categories the museum employed. With minimal labelling, it wasn't always apparent which objects were Perry's and which were from the collections, prompting visitors to consider their preconceptions about the value of different art forms. A response from the journal *Mortality*, which, in itself, demonstrated the reach of Perry's work, summed up the exhibition's ability to thwart attempts at classification. As reviewer Claire Gittings observed: "Subsidiary themes that inspired Perry were childhood, religion, folk art and 'the feminine,' though all these run into each other, more like the resonance of real life than traditional museum displays."³⁶⁵ More importantly for the purpose of this discussion, media and creative identities did too.

363 Susan M. Pearce, *Museums, Objects and Collections* (Washington DC: Smithsonian University Press, 1992), 72.

364 Jeremy Webster, *The Charms of Lincolnshire* (Lincoln: The Collection, 2006), 4.

365 Clare Gittings, "Exhibition review: The Charms of Lincolnshire," *Mortality* 12, no. 4 (2007): 391-392.

Conclusion

To a large extent, the relationship between ceramic practice and museum practice has echoed shifts in understandings of the museum's pedagogic role. Contemporary ceramic objects were initially regarded as tool for artistic instruction, but have been re-framed as a means through which the artist can facilitate visitors' meaning-making processes, linking historical and contemporary concerns. John Roberts has suggested that by the 1970s the museum had been forced to accommodate works that critiqued or challenged museum practice in order to remain relevant.³⁶⁶ He has posited that in its attempt to establish and maintain legitimacy as forum for contemporary art, "the museum must be equal to its own demise," accepting, for example, artists' claims on curatorship. It might be argued that the institutions that developed around studio pottery practice were, similarly, compelled to admit art-oriented ceramic works and multimedial modes of authorship in order to avoid being reduced to one aspect of contemporary ceramic practice on the periphery of a pluralistic domain. Proceeding from this perspective, museum collections might be regarded as sites of a productive friction, where both museums and ceramists can re-negotiate the discursive limits of a 'ceramics' whose identity is contingent on such framings and whose pluralism challenges their authority.

In closing on Perry's work, this chapter might seem to elevate his approach above those of committed ceramists. Yet, he, like many of the other examples in this chapter, simply demonstrates the dialogic potential of objects and the fact that the use of craft skill or a particular medium need not dictate the discourse around them. They can be a 'staging area,' without being effaced by (or privileged over) concept. Curators have seized upon the dialogic potential of works by Eglin and others such as Richard Slee, Barnaby Barford and Paul Scott, who use the recognisable formal language of historic practices to address equally legible contemporary issues without departing from object

366 John Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and De-skilling in Art After the Ready-made*, 166.

making.³⁶⁷ However, whilst many of the projects discussed in this chapter use ceramics to talk about ceramics, their material resonance is an integral part of their capacity to provide a 'link,' whether between past and present or to the experiences of those that engage with them.

367 Chichester's Pallant House Gallery, which produced exhibitions such as *Contemporary Eye: Material Matters* (2009) and *Contemporary Eye: Crossovers* (2010-11), has excelled at this. In the latter example Barnaby Barford's figurines, which feature imagery from popular culture, were arranged in discussion with the museum's collection of eighteenth-century Bow porcelain figurines. Like Eglin's exhibition, the objects served to translate the past in the present.

Chapter FOUR: Space and Place

Whilst the examples in the previous chapter centred on the narrative potential of ceramics, Bal has argued for a multi-medialisation of the concept of discourse, arguing “Language can be part of the media used in a discourse, not the other way round.”³⁶⁸ If we accept her theory then we must also examine other instances of discursive articulation, revisiting the notion that silence has dominated studio ceramics and interrogating the models of viewer/spectator/participant that gestures of showing presuppose.

Taking the sculptural works that developed from studio pottery practice as a departure point, this chapter asks how their ambiguous disciplinary status impacted on their critical reception. Observing a shift away from interdisciplinary approaches towards a renewed concern with the Modernist concept of self-referentiality in the late 1970s and 1980s, it outlines how plinths were enlisted as a means of separating ceramic vessels from the everyday and reinforcing their aesthetic properties. However, comparing these efforts to sculptural approaches to the vessel in the same period, it exposes the discursive limitations of pottery when framed as an art form.

Moving away from the plinth, the discussion then turns to gestures of showing that explore the formal architectural properties and emotional resonance of historic houses, examining the modes of authorship that they employ. Addressing the wider potential and pitfalls of site-specific practice as a medium, it concludes that the discursive sites that ceramists produce through their works can be further reframed by the exhibition history of artist, museum and visitor. Although offering opportunities to both embrace and silence the polyvocality of ceramics, it cautions that ‘gestures of showing always leave room for ‘escape attempts.’

368 Mieke Bal, *Double Exposures. The Subject of Cultural Analysis*, 3.

1. Sculptural ambitions

There is [...] no reason why fired clay should not be used, as other sculptural materials are nowadays, to explore, so to speak, functions which have no basis in immediate life needs, with its own symbolic justification.³⁶⁹

Many ceramists [...] believe that – following the ideas pressed home by critics such as Rose Slivka – the ceramic-sculpture-divide has been bridged. I do not. I believe that there is a distinction between an applied art such as pottery (whether it be functional or decorative) and fine art.³⁷⁰

Written between in 1971 and 1986, by critics who were trying to address contemporary ceramic practice, these statements chart the shifting attitudes to its relationship with sculpture in that period. By 1971, sculptors such as Robert Morris, Carl Andre and Eva Hesse had begun to create works using materials that were not traditionally associated with fine art, such as plywood, felt, cheap metal, rubber and – importantly for ceramic practitioners – raw clay. They were also concerned with the phenomenological relationship to the object, producing works that heightened spectators' awareness of their own embodied presence and its impact on their reading of a work. In 1966, describing a spectrum of "useless three-dimensional things," Morris argued that because one is forced to place a distance between oneself and a monumental object, engagement with it is, necessarily, bodily and, because the literal space that surrounds it becomes integral to its reading, public.³⁷¹ By contrast, he suggested that engagement with smaller objects was intimate and exclusive.

Morris's *Bodyspacemotionthings* – a work that united his concerns, made its first appearance at London's Tate gallery in 1971.³⁷² Inviting audience

369 Philip Rawson, *Ceramics*, 206.

370 Peter Dormer, "Bridging Disciplines," in *The New Ceramics: Trends and Traditions* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986), 47-48.

371 Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture (parts I & II)," in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 222-235.

372 Tate Gallery, "Robert Morris: Bodyspacemotionthings," Tate Gallery, accessed July 3, 2014, <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/robert-morris->

members to climb over and physically interact with materials and the structures he arranged them into, he intended to make visitors aware of how their physical actions informed their perceptions.³⁷³ Closed after four days, due to their apparently over exuberant engagement with the work, the exhibition hit the headlines in the UK and highlighted the move away from established fine art materials and formats, which Rawson, the author of the first quote, identified.

Although such approaches offered new ways of considering the characteristics of materials and our engagement with them, the discourse around ceramics was still focused on matters of technical skill and its contribution to the final product. Instead, the sculptural ceramic works that gained critical attention in Britain in the 1970s and '80s grew out of studio pottery practice and internalised the tenets of Modernism, which contemporary sculptors such as Morris had left behind.³⁷⁴ Inspired by the teaching of people such as Coper, Baldwin and Duckworth, who had risen to fame in the 1950s and who used ceramic techniques and materials to explore the abstract and expressive potential of the vessel form, this new wave of makers expanded upon their concerns.

Initially, scale posed the most obvious challenge to existing curatorial orthodoxies. For example *International Ceramics* – an exhibition held at the V&A in 1972, featured a broad range of work from 38 countries, gathered in display cases according to their geographical origin. As Tony Hepburn and Michael Cardew – the first concerned with sculpture, the second firmly engaged with pottery tradition – observed, sculptural works dominated their functional

bodyspacemotionthings. The organisation recreated the work, in collaboration with Morris, at Tate Modern in 2009. By that stage, works that invited audience interaction dominated the programme for the Turbine Hall gallery, where the new iteration was sited.

373 Julia Bryan-Wilson, "Robert Morris's 1971 Tate Gallery Retrospective," in *Robert Morris* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press), 153-176.

374 Philip Rawson, *Ceramics*, 206. Rawson devoted just a small part of his book to sculpture, in sections on 'Ceramic Sculpture,' 'Far Eastern Ceramic Sculpture,' 'Ceramic Sculpture and Imaginary Worlds' and 'Sculpture in Clay.'

counterparts.³⁷⁵ However, this was most apparent in work made by or inspired by American ceramists such as Voulkos, who Slivka addressed in her article 'The New Ceramic Presence.'³⁷⁶ As Harrod has observed, few British ceramists who created sculpture worked on the grand scale their American counterparts did.³⁷⁷ Nevertheless, those who did were forced to seek out exhibition spaces that could accommodate their work. In the process, they highlighted the fact that the institutional affiliations of the maker, rather than the materiality of the objects they produced, often determined the discursive framing of their work.

Hepburn – who had worked and, later, lived in the USA was instrumental in making and facilitating the exposition of such works. His exhibition *Recent Work (Materials Pieces)* at Camden Arts Centre in 1971 included towering arrangements, which incorporated massive ceramic blocks, rope, metal, wood and raw and unfired clay. *Ceramic Review* also illustrated a smaller piece [fig. 12], which Tony Birks later reproduced in the revised edition of his book *Art of the Modern Potter* (1976) and described as a 'clay and steel construction.'³⁷⁸ Comprised of two stoneware cylinders coated with silver lustre, joined together with a steel rod, from which twelve discs made from slip in shades of pink, beige and grey were suspended, it straddled the territory between the work of artists who were concerned with the properties of materials, such as Morris, and more formally-oriented sculptors, such as Anthony Caro.

The aluminium and painted steel structures that Caro produced during the 1960s, such as *Month of May* (1963) [fig. 13] were presented on the floor and comprised of various elements that worked in relationship with each other, like notes in a musical composition. Projecting out into the gallery, the linear beams

375 Tony Hepburn and Michael Cardew, "International Ceramics 1972," *Ceramic Review*, no. 17 (1972): 10-11.

376 Rose Slivka, "The New Ceramic Presence," *Craft Horizons*, no. 4 (1961): 31-37.

377 Tony Hepburn and Michael Cardew, "International Ceramics 1972," *Ceramic Review* no. 17; Tanya Harrod, "Pots & Sculpture," *Ceramic Review*, no. 105 (1987): 20-21.

378 John Berry, "Recent Work – (Materials Pieces) by Tony Hepburn," *Ceramic Review*, no. 13 (1972): 19. Tony Birks, *Art of the Modern Potter*, 2nd ed. (London: Country Life Books, 1976), 18.

and bars, invited the visitor to orient themselves around the works, considering the impact that their position in space had on their perception of the work. Hepburn's work, similarly, sat on the floor and, without a plinth to demarcate its limits, shared the space with the spectator. However, there were obvious differences – Caro assembled his sculpture from readymade metal forms, but Hepburn's sculptural elements were handcrafted. Whereas critics Greenberg and Michael Fried remarked on Caro's movement away from objecthood towards the gestural, Hepburn's works were more tightly composed. Nonetheless, his abstract compositions reflected the concerns of recent sculpture more than they did those of his ceramic contemporaries.³⁷⁹

Hepburn's choice of venue – a recently established arts centre with no association with any particular art form was illuminating. Although the V&A's Circulation Department had acquired a number of Hepburn's large sculptures for the *Five Studio Potters* exhibition (1967), the museum was not accustomed to exhibiting contemporary sculpture, which fell within the remit of other institutions such as the Serpentine and the Tate. The Crafts Advisory Committee gallery had limited space and other exhibition spaces with histories of showing studio ceramics and the crafts were similarly ill-equipped to contend with work that was difficult to retail and which required space. However, museums and CAC-supported venues were rapidly becoming key exposition sites for those whose work was less easily marketed.

This situation posed a conundrum for students who, having witnessed the loosening of attitudes to medium, enrolled on ceramics courses with the intention of employing it as a sculptural medium: where should they exhibit? Two such aspiring sculptors, Peacock and Richard Mackness came to ceramics through the foundation course at York Art School. Inspired by the teaching of Geoff Swindell and the works of people such as Astbury, both of whom moved ceramics beyond the pot, they enrolled on the ceramics course at Bristol

379 David Cohen, "Anthony Caro: Sculpture with a Twist," *Metalsmith* 32, no. 2 (2012): 46. Caro was awarded a retrospective at London's Hayward Gallery in 1969 and another at New York's Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in 1975.

Polytechnic.³⁸⁰ George Rainer and, later, Peter Simpson, who both made small ceramic sculptures, led the course and there were visiting lectures by Hepburn, Baldwin, Lowndes and Mo Jupp, all of whom explored the sculptural potential of ceramics in different ways and whose work is addressed in this and later chapters.

Abreast of developments in contemporary sculpture as well as the debates about ceramic sculpture in the UK and the USA, Peacock and Mackness produced hybrid works that struggled to find a home in ceramics or art venues. Mackness was interested in ritual and religious iconography, making works such as *Cult 1000* (1977), in which he clamped ceramic forms coated in metallic spray paint to a workbench that bore the impressions of various implements, fusing the iconography of workmanship with that of the sacrifice [fig. 14]. Peacock also used mixed media, firing his clay in sections, rather than accepting the limitations imposed by kiln size. His works, such as *Impact Imperative* (1978) – a huge, fragmented, floor piece, which referenced forensic investigation and could be reconfigured – were conceptually, as well as physically, distinct from those of his fellow students, although the influence of Astbury's archaeological impulse was clear [fig. 15].³⁸¹

Whilst Mackness moved on to teach, Peacock gained a place on the prestigious MA ceramics course at the RCA where his works garnered wider critical attention. As he continued to work on a grand scale, the college was unable to fit his work into the existing spaces used for the ceramics degree shows and, instead, gave him the whole of the College's Gulbenkian gallery. This led to a solo show at Nottingham's Midland Group Gallery, where he exhibited his "drawings, objects and artifacts."³⁸² His work also provided the

380 Richard Mackness, email message to author, March 17, 2014. Mackness joined the course at Bristol a year after Peacock, whose work inspired him.

381 Percy Peacock, in discussion with the author, April 19, 2013. His contemporaries included Martin Smith, the current head of ceramics and glass at the RCA, a fellow Bristol alumnus with whom Peacock shared a studio space.

382 Midland Group Gallery, *Drawings Objects and Artifacts: Percy Peacock* (Nottingham: Midland Group Gallery, 1978).

catalyst for the accompanying conference *Craft into Art Goes*, which was funded by the Arts Council and the CAC, as well as East Midlands Arts. A regional, Arts Council-funded artists' cooperative, which exhibited work by an eclectic range of living artists from potter Mary Rogers to Jackson Pollock, like Peacock, the gallery had an interdisciplinary focus.³⁸³ It, therefore, provided the perfect meeting point for the two councils and works that challenged the modes of categorisation that they upheld.

The discussion came at a point when ceramic-centred publications commonly used the term 'ceramic sculpture,' to describe work that was produced by trained ceramists, but diverged from the studio pottery model, from decorative objects to Peacock's mixed media compositions. However, Nicholas Pope and Barry Flanagan, established sculptors who used clay along with other materials, were also in attendance, offering their perspectives.³⁸⁴ Whilst participants from Barton and Baldwin to Pope all argued against the use of the term, claiming that clay and ceramic technique were simply means of producing sculpture, the issue of value was the crux of the matter.³⁸⁵ As organiser David Vaughan summed up:

There seems, generally, to be some confusion over the labels that we apply, which in categorising works in terms of materials and techniques, define the way in which some forms of art are looked at and considered.³⁸⁶

Whether, the label 'ceramic sculpture' was, as Flanagan suggested, simply a means of commanding higher prices, a consequence of an education system whose disciplinary divisions did not reflect contemporary practice, or a refusal

383 Hannah Neate, "Provinciality and the Art World: The Midland Group 1961-77," *Social and Cultural Geography* 13, no. 3 (2012): 275-294.

384 Midland Group Gallery. *Drawings, Objects and Artefacts, Percy Peacock; Craft Into Art Goes: A discussion 28 January 1978, Midland Group, Nottingham* (Nottingham: Midland Group Gallery, 1978).

385 Ibid., 4.

386 Ibid., 3.

to discard craft values and medium-specificity, the term provided a frame that shifted the focus from the work to material.

Alert to these issues, Hepburn organised an exhibition *Clay Sculpture*, which was held at Yorkshire Sculpture Park in 1980. Proposing: “a clay sculptor questioning only the history of clay sculpture is choosing a limited measuring stick,” he presented the exhibition as an opportunity to test the sculptural credentials of such work.³⁸⁷ The park’s remit was explicit – it was a *sculpture* park, rather than a ceramics venue. However, although an earlier show on wood had included the work of established sculptors such as Caro and William Pye, Roy Tucker and John Maine, *Clay Sculpture* only featured trained ceramists. Whilst there was a Barbara Hepworth exhibition in the park at the same time, as well as work by sculptors such as Caro, the exhibition, therefore, avoided measuring clay sculptures produced by ceramists against those of their contemporaries such as Flanagan and Pope.

The exhibition format demanded large scale works with the ability to withstand the elements: something that appealed to the makers of the types of clay sculpture being produced in the USA, where Hepburn had since emigrated, more than those working in the UK. Consequently, when British participating artists Peacock, Baldwin, Glenys Barton, Eileen Nisbet, Christine Merton, Mackness and Astbury were asked to make works specifically for the exhibition it yielded mixed results.³⁸⁸

In an analysis of Yorkshire Sculpture Park’s development, Suzanne MacLeod observed that the types of work for which it was originally intended – semi-abstract forms in natural materials, by sculptors such as the locally born Barbara Hepworth and Henry Moore – had been superseded by the more urban

387 Tony Hepburn, “The Clay Club and Other Related Thoughts,” *Clay Sculpture*, Exhibition Records 1978-9, Yorkshire Sculpture Park archive.

388 Yorkshire Sculpture Park, *Clay Sculpture* (Wakefield: Yorkshire Sculpture Park, 1980). The exhibition also included the work of Missouri-born Jim Robison, who had moved to Yorkshire in the 1970s.

aesthetic of Caro and his contemporaries by the time it opened in 1977.³⁸⁹ It might, therefore, be argued that the works of Hepburn, Baldwin and Jim Robison, which were more akin to the organic aesthetic of Hepworth and Moore, formed a better fit with the park's ethos.

Hepburn's stacked towers and low-level plateaux were shown in an adjacent solo exhibition, *Economical Retrospection*, which was installed in a tennis court.³⁹⁰ Including other materials such as wood and stone, as well as readymade bricks, they were particularly suited to the sculpture park environment. Baldwin's submission, which took on the appearance of a prehistoric monument eroded by the elements, or a petrified trunk, also gained a new resonance when shown within the landscape.³⁹¹ Framed by the park, their scale became legible in relation to the grand vistas of nature, rather than the tight focus of the white cube. As US-born Jim Robison, who exhibited his totem-pole-like megaliths [fig. 16] observed, echoing Morris:

It's good to be unable to pick a ceramic piece up and turn it over like a specimen for examination, and to require a viewer to exert energy to walk around it, to force a look up as well as down on it, to create forms that have a capacity to communicate at a distance as well as create interest close up.³⁹²

However, whilst Morris argued, "the better new work takes relationships out of the work and makes them a function of space, light and the viewer's field of vision," Robison's allusion to the close-up indicated a continued concern with the authorial traces of craftsmanship.³⁹³ He dissociated his work from the intimate ceramic 'piece,' which could be picked up, and

389 Suzanne MacLeod, "This Magical Place. The Making of Yorkshire Sculpture Park and the Politics of Landscape, Art and Narrative," in *Museum Making. Narratives, Architectures, Exhibitions*, eds. Suzanne MacLeod, Laura Hourston Hanks and Jonathan Hale (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 48-62.

390 *Economical Retrospection*, Clay Sculpture, Exhibition Records 1980, Yorkshire Sculpture Park archive. Hepburn's drawings and smaller works were shown indoors in the Camellia House.

391 Ironically, given Baldwin's emphasis on descriptive titles, its name was not recorded.

392 Jim Robison, "Artist's Statement," in *Yorkshire Sculpture Park, Clay Sculpture*, n.p.

393 Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture (parts I & II)," in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 222-235.

relocated it within the discourse around sculpture, yet he refused to reduce the object to “a term amongst others,” within the perception of an artwork as Morris did.

Rather than scaling-up his ceramic objects, Astbury, who was acknowledged to have “done much of the groundwork” for the younger artists in the exhibition through his experimentation with the associative properties of clay, highlighted the merits of detailed analysis.³⁹⁴ He submitted two works, *Sticky Dry Open* and *Sky Tunnel*. The first was comprised of a large wooden frame, which held a checkerboard of alternate dry porcelain clay and sticky putty panels, which caught debris flying through the air [fig. 17]. The second was an open-ended fired porcelain box with drawings inside, covered in blister packs containing ceramic shards and sticky panels, atop tall metal legs [fig. 18]. Elevating the miniscule particles captured on the sticky panels and the fragments – which also alluded to the historical value of the trace – beyond sight he, frustratingly, solicited and denied close scrutiny. *Sky Tunnel* – perhaps in a nod to James Turrell’s skyspaces, which did the same on a more architectural level – also promoted close observation by framing a portion of the sky. As addressed later in this chapter, both works were explicitly site-sensitive. However, the use of other media was central to their formal success.

By contrast, Peacock, who came from a later generation, was less concerned with either object-making or separation from the everyday. Operating on a horizontal plane, his *Time Domesticity* (1980) employed a spatial logic that was akin to that seen in the work of minimalist sculptors such as Richard Serra and Carl Andre, but tempered with a concern for the biographical potential of materials.³⁹⁵ The work was comprised of a 40ft zigzag of broken clay sections arrayed across a wire mesh, which bore the impression

394 Gordon Young, “Introduction,” in *Clay Sculpture*, n.p.

395 Andrew Nairne, “Building a Wall,” *Frieze*, no. 27 (1996), accessed March 14, 2013.

http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/building_a_wall. In 1976 a Sunday Times article about Andre’s work *Equivalent VIII*, which the Tate had acquired four years earlier, had sparked the ‘Bricks controversy,’ which centred on the value of the work in relation to the cost of the 120 firebricks that it was comprised of.

of a tiled floor, into which he had walked the clay. He also incorporated Polaroids of people and objects photographed against that tiled floor, sealing them into plate glass. Referencing archaeological process and the cyclical nature of the emergence from, and return to, the ground, it challenged reductive views of the relationship between ceramics and sculpture as well as the interior and exterior. On the same level as the floor from which it was cast, it did not shout for attention, but used the site to add another layer of meaning. It was a floor on a floor: a clay cast of a clay form, which might (and, indeed, did) return to the earth from which it was born.

Whilst Astbury and Peacock were able to reconcile their existing practice with the dictates of the sculpture park environment, many objects were exhibited indoors in the Camellia House instead. This demonstrated the conflict between the conceptual aim of the exhibition and the strictures of ceramic process, which make working at scale difficult. The experience of Mackness, who was unable to meet the challenge of producing a large-scale work that would withstand the elements, highlighted another issue: the limitations of the outdoor environment as a display space for expanded sculptural practice.

For his contribution to the show, Mackness used a low fence to demarcate a section of ground, likening it to an enclosed garden. He divided the area into two, as one might divide a lawn to play games and placed a 3-metre-high welded steel frame in the centre with ambiguous clay forms arrayed across a grid of 10mm steel rods. Resting a cast-clay umpire's chair on one side and various nonsensical forms on the other, he aimed to compare the relationship between technology and religion to game-play. However, when actualized, Mackness felt the final piece – *Subungulate Garden* – was dwarfed by the landscape and its intended surrealistic qualities lost. Whilst he had enjoyed the freedom of working at scale with unfired clay, he lacked the facilities and experience to fire a work of comparable scale.³⁹⁶ Nevertheless, he was not alone

³⁹⁶ Richard Mackness, email message to author, March 17, 2014.

in struggling to produce work for the sculpture park. Just three years later Caro professed that he too felt that the park's vast space detracted from his work.³⁹⁷

Discussing Peacock and Mackness, curator Gordon Young pondered: "Whether or not their approach and concerns end up as esoteric meanderings on the peripheries of sculpture remains to be seen."³⁹⁸ The fact that the exhibition was not included in the definitive publication on the Sculpture Park's history and little documentation of the works exists may indicate that this was their fate.³⁹⁹ They ended up on the peripheries of ceramics too.⁴⁰⁰

2. Vesselism

Claire Bishop has argued that artworks that are able to raise an awareness of the impact that the space around them has on our processes of perception have challenged the notion of the autonomous art object and the purity of artistic media.⁴⁰¹ Although such experience was heightened in minimalist sculpture, which offered little visual distraction, the works of Peacock and Astbury, in particular, also demanded the spectator's active engagement. Approaching *Time Domesticity*, visitors stood in the same relation to Peacock's floor as they would to the floors in their own homes. Evoking crumbling archaeological remains and contemporary home life, his work provided Cezanne's 'link,' as addressed in the previous chapter, between the present and those who walked

397 Anthony Caro, "How sculpture gets looked at," in *A Sense of Place*, ed. Peter Davies and Tony Knipe (Sunderland: Sunderland Arts Centre, 1984), 40-43.

398 Gordon Young, "Introduction," *Clay Sculpture*, n.p.

399 Lynne Green, *Yorkshire Sculpture Park: Landscape for Art* (Wakefield: Yorkshire Sculpture Park, 2008).

400 Peacock moved with the tide of sculpture, engaging with other media that suited his ideas and attained a degree of success as one half of the artistic partnership Dutton and Peacock, whilst Mackness has a successful business, which produces contemporary design for the urban environment. Both were instrumental in setting up alternative and interdisciplinary artist spaces: In 1995, Peacock was part of a team who established S1 Artspace in Sheffield, which combined studio and exhibition space, and in 1981 Mackness and a group of his contemporaries took over a large semi-derelict industrial space in London's Waterloo and then three years later established Globe Studios in Shoreditch. Richard Mackness, email message to author, March 17, 2014; Percy Peacock, in discussion with the author, April 19, 2013.

401 Claire Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History* (London: Tate Publishing, 2005), 53.

the earth before. Working on a different level, Astbury's work challenged the Kantian notion that art should demand disinterested aesthetic appreciation and called upon the spectator to actively engage in the act of looking.⁴⁰² Placing the details of the work at a tantalizing distance, those who wanted to view them were impelled to stand on their toes, to navigate around the work and to question. The works on display were not discrete objects whose medium could be neatly defined: they were produced through the conjunction of the objects, the visitor's relationship to them and their spatial and temporal location.⁴⁰³

These works were produced at the very point when the crafts in Britain had established a support network that was largely premised on their distinction as a set of medium-specific disciplines. As studio pottery practice expanded into studio ceramic practice, the fledgling institutions that had developed around the former moved to accommodate it. Although the gap between some types of fine art and ceramic work diminished, ceramic practice became increasingly institutionalized on the basis of the artists' association with a single medium, rather than the work they produced. Indeed, *Clay Sculpture* and *Art into Craft Goes* received funding from the CAC.⁴⁰⁴ Whilst the artists discussed above were showing the complexity of their work, they did so through bodies that did not challenge medium-based hierarchies, but sought, instead, to raise the artistic status of ceramics.

MacLeod suggests that in the late 1970s and early '80s Yorkshire Sculpture Park operated in the hinterland of a London-centric, Oxbridge and Courtauld trained gallery system. Similarly, the artist-run Camden Arts Centre and the Midland Group Gallery were interdisciplinary and inclusive. Providing ideal outlets for those whose work did not easily fall under the remit of existing

402 Immanuel Kant, *Kant's Critique of Judgement*, trans. J.H. Bernard, 2nd rev. ed. (London: Macmillan, 1914) accessed August 28, 2014, <http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/1217>.

403 In fact, both incorporated other materials too, suggesting that Hepburn's decision to include them was based on their training, more than their work.

404 Yorkshire Sculpture Park, *Clay Sculpture*, n.p; Midland Group Gallery, *Drawings, Objects and Artefacts*, Percy Peacock; *Craft Into Art Goes: A discussion*, 1.

institutions, they also allowed those bodies to exclude them from their view of history. As a result, they have had little impact on museum practice.

By the 1980s Hepburn had emigrated to the USA and, disheartened by their experiences, Peacock and Mackness were moving away from ceramics. Furthermore, as Adamson has observed, potters had “fervently embraced the ‘Greenberg effect,’ and tried to escape the limiting constraints of craft in favour of expressive optical presence.”⁴⁰⁵ This was most apparent in the work of Fritsch and Britton, which received a great deal of attention from the Crafts Council and in publications about ceramics.

Coper, Fritsch’s former tutor, was a major influence on her approach. As detailed previously, he focused on aesthetic refinement and avoided requests to define his work. Fritsch, similarly, aimed to produce works that served as visual poems, resisting textual analysis.⁴⁰⁶ She capitalised on the way in which pictorial reproduction can reduce an object to its essence, making matte stoneware pots that resembled two-dimensional images [fig. 19]. As a musician who trained at the Royal Academy of Music, she likened her approach to form and decoration to musical composition. In a gesture of showing that sought to drive this point home, she showed her pots at the British Crafts Centre, on plinths and accompanied by piano music by Veryan Weston, in an exhibition titled *Improvisations from Earth to Air* (1977).⁴⁰⁷

Fritsch’s approach conformed to the model of abstraction that Greenberg outlined in ‘Towards a Newer Laocoon’ (1940), where he urged artists to rid their work of all subject matter to avoid subsumption by other art forms – in particular, literature.⁴⁰⁸ For Greenberg, music was the art that came closest to “pure form,” and in aligning her formal approach with music, rather than

405 Glenn Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft*, 43.

406 John Houston and Elizabeth Fritsch, “Traps to Fill Emptiness,” *Crafts*, no. 10 (1974): 13-16.

407 Fritsch lived with Weston and other artists and musicians at the Digswell House artist’s community, where Coper had previously resided. Digswell Arts, “Past Artists,” Digswell Arts, accessed May 12, 2015, <http://digswellarts.org/past-artists/digswell-house/liz-fritsch/>.

408 Clement Greenberg, “Towards a Newer Laocoon,” in *Art in Theory 1900-1990*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 563.

claiming to translate its works, Fritsch aspired to a similar indeterminacy. However, whilst Greenberg argued that it was crucial to work within the specific properties of a medium, Fritsch's adaptive model of practice was perhaps closer to that of the Russian abstract painter Wassily Kandinsky, who had addressed similar concerns in the early twentieth century.⁴⁰⁹ Yet, whilst both made the case for adherence to the specific properties of a medium, Fritsch effaced the three-dimensionality that characterised pottery, creating graphic abstractions.

Like Fritsch, Britton was also concerned with the relationship with painting and in creating harmony between form and decoration. However, her ideas were perhaps more clearly expressed in her words than her work.⁴¹⁰ Contributing to exhibition catalogues including *The Maker's Eye* (1981), *Fast Forward* (1985) and *The Raw and the Cooked*, which she also co-curated (1993), providing the introduction to Dormer's *The New Ceramics* (1986) and writing commissioned features for *Crafts*, she became a dominant voice in the discourse around ceramics.⁴¹¹

Writing in the *Maker's Eye* catalogue, Britton used the modern novels of Proust and Joyce, which were "both made of, and about, language," to explain that her work and that of many of her contemporaries, was concerned with, but not solely motivated by function and, thus, "closely in line with modernism in the other arts."⁴¹² She expanded on her ideas in other texts, arguing that works such as her own should not be described as sculpture – a category that, she claimed, their emphasis on containment and their medium specificity excluded

409 Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, trans. Hilla Rebay (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1946), 35. "...one art must learn from another how to use its common principle and how to apply it to the fundamentals of its own medium. Borrowing these methods, the artist must not forget that all mediums contain within themselves unique characteristics, and is up to him to discover their proper application."

410 Alison Britton, *Seeing Things: Collected Writing on Art, Craft and Design* (London: Occasional Papers, 2013). Britton's writings from 1970 to present day were re-published as a book in 2013.

411 These exhibitions are discussed in more detail in chapters three and six.

412 Alison Britton, "Untitled," in *The Maker's Eye*, 16.

them from – but were more closely aligned with painting.⁴¹³ Looking to history, she explored histories of pottery in which utilitarian forms had been used to decorative ends, from 14th-century Hispano-Moresque dishes and 16th-century Palissy wall plaques through to Picasso's works.⁴¹⁴ She also acknowledged the impact of influences from outside pottery, famously describing them as ranging from "Sèvres to Krazy Kat."⁴¹⁵ Lauding the superior expressive properties of hand building over the predictable roundness of wheel throwing and seeking alternatives to the functional focus of Anglo-Oriental studio pottery, this attempt to re-frame pottery might be seen to represent a period of re-evaluation of medium-specific training in contemporary society.

Of course, there were other types of work. For example, one artist who participated in *Clay Sculpture*, Glenys Barton, challenged studio pottery norms by using bone china – a material associated with industry – and, from the mid 1970s, employing figures. She was also alert to the work of American minimalist sculptors, having seen the works of Morris, Donald Judd and Andre in the touring exhibition *The Art of the Real: USA 1948-68* at the Tate in 1969.⁴¹⁶ However, she felt bound to her medium, admitting: "I sense the dilemma of scale against technical practicalities. I would like to conceive a cathedral but cannot forsake the timeless, almost precious quality of ceramic material."⁴¹⁷ To counter this, she inserted figures into her geometric landscapes such as the J.G. Ballard inspired *Terminal Zone I* (1974) and *Sky Plateau II* (1976-77), inviting the spectator to project themselves into the situation [figs. 20 & 21].

These works and others that were discussed under the banner of 'The New Ceramics,' had little impact on spatial practices within the museum. Efforts to re-frame pottery and ceramics were, largely played out through heavily authored, object-centred, temporary group exhibitions in public art

413 Alison Britton, "Introduction," in *The New Ceramics. Trends and Traditions*, ed. Peter Dormer, reprint. (1988), 7-10.

414 Ibid.

415 Alison Britton, "Sèvres with Krazy Kat."

416 Ibid., 5.

417 Ibid., 6.

galleries, some of which are catalogued in the final chapter of this thesis. However, the late 1970s to early '90s were dominated by one-person shows at places such as The Crafts Council Gallery, V&A Craft Shop or commercial galleries.⁴¹⁸ There, plinths continued to serve as framing devices, separating the works from daily life and marking them as worthy of aesthetic contemplation [fig. 22]. Otherwise, catering to the commodity culture of the 1980s, they were placed in shop displays or designer room sets (issues which we will return to later), which highlighted their status as desirable lifestyle accessories.

When they were acquired and shown in museums, contemporary ceramic works were mostly shown in vitrines to guard against breakage and theft – an approach that commercial galleries had also begun to adopt for valuable one-off works.⁴¹⁹ As images of the ceramics galleries in 1909 and 1999 demonstrate, display techniques at the V&A changed little in the twentieth century [figs. 23-24]. Spaced out in cases within small rooms alongside the existing ceramics galleries, works by Coper and Ruth Duckworth could be viewed in the round, but in groups, with glass in-between. Hooper-Greenhill has suggested that in such situations “The glass barrier severely restricts the communication potential of objects and artefacts. They communicate only through one sense, the visual, that sense itself operating under certain restrictions, limited to a specific distance, angle of vision etc.”⁴²⁰ Whilst museums had been criticised for using such techniques, which sever useful objects from the everyday and aestheticise them, Britton had argued that pots such as her own created the expectation of use only to frustrate it.⁴²¹ Such

418 Crafts Council gallery shows in this period included Alison Britton (1979); Jacqui Poncelet (1981); Carol McNicoll (1985); Gillian Lowndes (1987); and Lucie Rie (1992). A range of ceramicists, including Nancy Angus, Carol McNicoll, Richard Batterham, Janice Tchalenko (in collaboration with Richard Wentworth), Christie Brown, Rupert Spira, Alison Britton, Stephen Dixon, John Maltby, Philip Eglin, Walter Keeler, Takeshi Yasuda and Gordon Baldwin exhibited at the Crafts Council Shop.

419 *Ceramic Review*, “Collecting,” *Ceramic Review*, no. 76 (1982): 3.

420 Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *The Educational Role of the Museum*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1999), 58.

421 Alison Britton, “The Modern Pot,” in *Fast Forward. New Directions in British Ceramics*, ed. ICA (London: ICA, 1985), 11-14.

presentation techniques also afforded 360 degree views of the pots' irregular form. For Britton, this provided a crucial point of difference from the Leachian orthodoxy of wheel throwing, as embodied in the round pot⁴²². Consequently, this focus on the optical helped to present the image of formal self-referentiality that was central to moves to establish decorative pottery as a prestigious art form in its own right: something that critics such as Dormer were also vociferously arguing for.⁴²³ Indeed, Fritsch purposely made works for museums.⁴²⁴

There were some issues: the use of showcases against walls prevented works from being shown so that their three-dimensional forms could be appreciated. As reviewer Peter Lane noted, when displayed in cases in the Castle Museum in Norwich, as part of a loan from the Crafts Council, Eileen Nisbet's small abstract porcelain sculptures suffered from both this issue and a lack of backlighting.⁴²⁵ In 1986 when US-based gallerist and critic Garth Clark donated a collection of American ceramics to the V&A, the size of the display cases partly also dictated acquisition choices.⁴²⁶ This fact provoked strong reactions when fellow V&A ceramics curator John Mallett acknowledged it, suggesting that potters should work on a small scale if they wanted the museum to collect their work.⁴²⁷ Yet, again, this posed few problems for the studio ceramic practitioners who had ambitions to be shown in existing exhibition contexts and so there was little change.⁴²⁸

422 Alison Britton, "The Contemporary Pot," in *The New Ceramics: Trends and Traditions* (London: Thames and Hudson), 8.

423 Peter Dormer, *The New Ceramics: Trends and Traditions*, 2nd revised edition, 12-18. Also see later discussion of the exhibition *Fast Forward: New Directions in British Ceramics* (1985).

424 Crafts, "Bursaries," *Crafts*, no. 45 (1980): 9.

425 Peter Lane, "Eileen Nisbet's Porcelain," *Ceramic Review*, no. 67 (1980): 22-24.

426 Oliver Watson, "American Potters Today. A Personal View," *Ceramic Review*, no. 99 (1986): 24.

427 Tanya Harrod, "Vessel (Serpentine, till 11 October) Alison Britton: New Ceramics (Contemporary Applied Arts, till 10 October)," *The Spectator*, October 2, 1987: 37.

428 Maureen Michaelson, "Studio Ceramics '94," *Ceramic Review*, no. 151 (1995): 18-19. In 1994, when the V&A housed a studio pottery exhibition that celebrated 25 years of *Ceramic Review*, they still placed a height limit of 20 inches on the entries.

The most high-profile discussions about the presentation of ceramics at this time were centred on the transition in the Crafts Council-championed Jacqueline Poncelet's work from the vessel towards the zoomorphic sculptural forms. Shown on the floor and leaning against walls of the white cube space of the Whitechapel Art Gallery in 1985, the latter were described by art critic Richard Cork as "pushing her work towards sculpture and away from an earlier involvement with craft ceramics."⁴²⁹ Her move from the plinth to floor attained such a key place in the discourse around ceramics that the V&A used it to argue for the historical significance of her *Horn and Claw Form* (1985) when they acquired it in 1998.⁴³⁰ Nonetheless, eschewing the plinth was hardly radical. As discussed earlier, weary of what art critic Lucy R. Lippard labelled "plinth-and-pedestal syndrome," sculptors – including ceramists – had been placing their work on the floor since the 1960s.⁴³¹ The fact that Poncelet removed herself from the Crafts Council's Index of makers that same year is more revealing.

The continued recourse to the discrete handmade object within the discourse around ceramics in Britain in the 1980s ran counter to the dominant sensibility in wider art practice, where attempts to efface the physical signs of authorship and the hierarchy of media had thrown a spotlight onto the contingency of meaning. As Poncelet had realized (and those in *Clay Sculpture* had failed to) when skill and the use of specific media are no longer guarantors of a work's art status, the circuits of presentation and valorization that constitute a work as art gain heightened importance.⁴³² Although later likening

429 Richard Cork, "Staying Power," in *New Spirit, New Sculpture, New Money: Art in the 1980s*, ed. Richard Cork (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2003) 180.

430 V&A Museum, "Horn and Claw," V&A, accessed March 1m 2014, <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O118565/horn-and-claw-form-poncelet-jacqui/>. "Historical significance: This piece represents the transition in Poncelet's work from the plinth-based to sculptural forms that might be placed on the gallery floor. It anticipates the work shown in her 1985 Whitechapel exhibition."

431 Lucy R. Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*, reprint (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), viii.

432 Martha Buskirk, *The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art* (Cambridge; Mass; London: MIT Press, 2005), 3.

the experience to “leaving home completely and cutting yourself off from your family,” she has argued that it was crucial for her to position herself within contexts that reflected her ambitions.⁴³³ Doing so, she moved from venues that privileged works that “superficially looked like sculpture,” but placed craft values first, to contexts in which her work might fail, but which offered opportunities to explore the full potential of sculpture.⁴³⁴ It is a strategy that others including Barton, who has largely exhibited at the fine art-led Angela Flowers Gallery since the early 1980s and others, such as Andrew Lord and Rachel Kneebone have also adopted successfully.

This situation may have led to a clear separation between pottery as a decorative art form and the use of ceramics in art. However, Buchloh had described formalist self-referentiality as “a prescription by which art until 1965 had to abide,” and ‘The New Ceramics,’ which followed this prescription was produced some decades later. The ceramic field thus became focused on monologues – whether of the individual artist or making pots about pots – at a point when dialogic practice had increased currency within the field of art.⁴³⁵ Ceramists may have presented their objects as autonomous art objects, but the rise of appropriation art and commodity sculpture in the 1980s saw artists such as Koons and David Mach incorporating readymade or commissioned vessels and ornamental ceramic objects to conceptual ends.⁴³⁶ These works were not approached with regard to craft skill or the continuation of ceramic tradition but as symbols of the everyday.

The clash between contemporary artists’ approaches to ceramic objects and the dialogue around the pot within ceramics was particularly evident in the Serpentine Gallery’s 1987 exhibition *Vessel*. Although curator Antony Stokes

433 Anatol Orient, “The Pleasures of Stuff,” *Ceramic Review*, no. 185 (2000): 26-7.

434 Ibid., 27.

435 Benjamin D. Buchloh, *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2003), 12.

436 In 1985 David Mach produced a work for Stoke-on-Trent City Museum out of 12,000 pieces of reject biscuit ware from Royal Doulton. Other works include Richard Wentworth’s *Cumulus* (1991), which used readymade plates and Tony Cragg’s *Zooid* (1991), which incorporated two smashed ceramic tigers.

claimed the exhibition challenged the traditional art/craft divide, it side-stepped it, placing works made with functional and decorative intent alongside those of contemporary painters and sculptors such as Gormley and Bruce McLean who used the vessel as the starting point for conceptual investigations.⁴³⁷ This inclusive approach ostensibly levelled the historical distinctions between art and craft, use and non-use, leaving the work to speak for itself. However, in comparison with the concept-led works that dominated the show, the works of those such as Rie, Britton and Tchalenko – described by critic Tanya Harrod as “proper potters” – appeared shallow.⁴³⁸

Whilst the potters’ pots fitted comfortably into the white cube environment, they located meaning in their formal and material properties, whereas for their fellow exhibitors, such vessels were to be filled with content through conceptual articulation. In an earlier series of works, *Pose Work for Plinths* (1971) McLean had questioned the use of plinths to monumentalise forms (in this case, figural sculptures) by staging performances where he draped himself over them [fig. 25].⁴³⁹ Adopting a similarly playful approach to the conventions of display, McLean had created a gigantic steel jug, decorated with a Modigliani-like figure, lurching forward from a fireplace. Fusing the conventions of abstract art with the iconography of the domestic and the feminine, his work operated on a number of levels. The jug referenced the female body as vessel – the hearth the association of both with the domestic. The title, *Place for a Jug*, toyed with the dual meaning of place: the fireplace and the “correct” place for a jug, for art and for women. Conversely, Britton’s slab built bowl forms stood on the very type of plinth that McLean had critiqued,

437 Richard Cork, “Art as Vessel, 17 September, 1987,” in *New Spirit, New Sculpture, New Money: Art in the 1980s*, ed. Richard Cork (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2003): 109-112.

438 Tanya Harrod, “Vessel (Serpentine, till 11 October) Alison Britton: New Ceramics (Contemporary Applied Arts, till 10 October),” 37.

439 Andrew Graham-Dixon, “The Name of the Pose,” *Independent*, November 3, 1987.

distanced from such narratives and soliciting aesthetic appreciation.⁴⁴⁰ As craft historian Rosemary Hill reflected on viewing the exhibition “If you’re a potter, the vessel is not *a* subject, it’s *the* subject.”⁴⁴¹ This is a condition of the discipline-first approach that defines the content of art-oriented pottery in the present day.

3. Framing the multiple

As critics have long observed, “The plinth in sculpture, like the frame in painting, establishes a mystical boundary between ordinary space occupied by things and artistic space filled by rarefied visual material.”⁴⁴² However, as *Vessel* demonstrated, functional forms risked becoming readymades for artists (or, as discussed in the previous chapter, curators). They might also slip back into the realm of what Art critic Arthur C. Danto called “mere real things.”⁴⁴³ Aware of this, one ceramist, Andrew Lord, used the plinth to serve a related, but different purpose: as a frame for vessel-based compositions, rather than individual art objects.

In the 1970s, Lord worked with Art & Project: a contemporary art gallery in the Netherlands, which engaged leading names from the worlds of Minimalist and Conceptual art from Andre and Sol le Witt to Joseph Kosuth and Buren. The gallery provided a fertile environment for Lord’s exploration of ceramics as a material and he embraced the freedom engendered by the collapse of modernist hierarchies to explore the interplay between the ceramic vessel as subject and object without prioritizing the latter. This cross-

440 The jug was a subject that McLean turned to on many occasions, even producing earthenware jugs, which were collected by institutions such as the V&A. Yet, as vehicles for his ideas, they held no special status as art objects and he had no interest in sustaining the notion that they were aesthetically autonomous.

441 “Rosemary Hill, Michael Berkeley and Anthony Stokes discuss the *Vessel* exhibition,” *Kaleidoscope*, BBC Radio 4 (September 10 & 11, 1987).

442 Oliver Shell, “Seeing Figures,” in *Matisse: Painter as Sculptor*, ed. Dorothy M. Kosinski, Jay McKean Fisher and Steven A. Nash (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 64.

443 Arthur C. Danto, “Works of Art and Mere Real Things,” in *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace: A Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1981), 1-32.

disciplinary approach offered an alternative to the dichotomous arguments about craft versus ceramic sculpture in the UK.

It was also during the 1970s that Lord began to produce works comprised of grouped objects, such as *Round Grey Shadow* coffee set (1978), which Britton selected for her *Maker's Eye* display [fig. 26]. Painting the shadows that fell onto the clay vessels that he had made, Lord captured the effects that light conditions had on a scene at a specific moment. This approach referenced Monet's serial paintings, yet as both subject and three-dimensional object his compositions were further overlaid by the environmental conditions in which they were viewed. Lord produced sculptures of pots, which acted as a vehicle through which to address the physical relationship between people, objects and space. In contrast to Britton's work, which "perform[ed] a function, and at the same time [...drew] attention to what their own rules are about," his sought to highlight the ways in which context could shape the reading of a work.⁴⁴⁴ It is, therefore, unsurprising that, like Poncelet, he has divorced his work from craft contexts.

A more meditative take on painted precedents is evidenced in the work of Gwyn Hanssen-Pigott who, in the 1980s, started to produce groups of vessels inspired by Giorgio Morandi's still-lives. In his paintings Morandi focused on the composition of plain vessels, their stripped-down forms divesting them of their domesticity and imbuing them with an ambiguous sculptural presence. In Hanssen-Pigott's three-dimensional re-interpretations the porcelain vessels were largely cloaked in subtly varied off-white glazes. This had a similar abstracting function and allowed the formal relationship between the objects to take priority. Although the work itself was made of ceramics and the vessel form is part of ceramic tradition, the overarching framework through which it was presented was drawn from painting. But whilst the picture frame defined the limits of Morandi's illusionistic scene, Hanssen-Pigott's, as with Lord's still life arrangements, effectively occupied the same space as the viewer.

444 Crafts Council, ed. *The Maker's Eye*, (London: Crafts Council): 16.

Lord and Hanssen-Pigott used display techniques to dissociate their ostensibly useful forms from their functional and decorative counterparts. However, this distinction was complicated when their works were re-positioned within museum collection displays that included visually similar objects. As Martha Buskirk has proposed “The reading of any work will be influenced by the context of its presentation. For works that are not fixed as physical entities, however, interpretation also shapes how the work is constituted.”⁴⁴⁵ The potency of this re-shaping is evident in the V&A’s chronologically displayed ceramics gallery, which contains two groups of objects that Hanssen-Pigott produced for different contexts. The label accompanying her *Still Life, 2 bottles, Goblet and Beaker* (1992) [fig. 27] includes details about her artistic background as well as medium and technique, announcing “By referring deliberately to fine art traditions such as painting, Hanssen Pigott alters the way her work is perceived.”⁴⁴⁶ In contrast, the text that accompanies a punch set made at an earlier stage in her career is limited to provenance, medium and techniques used. Also displayed as a group, the interrelationship of the cups and bowl reflects the punch set’s use, rather than making an aesthetic statement. Whilst this is addressed through the labels, the overarching visual narratives of chronology and collection subsume the subtle difference between the arrested use of the punch set, which was purchased from Liberty’s and so intended for use at home, and the negated use of the still life. Similarly, whilst Lord has shunned associations with the crafts, his *Cubist Vase and Tray* (1978) is on display in the same gallery [fig. 28]. Sited on the same shelf as Dan Arbeid’s individual pin pots, which curators have arranged in a small group, the difference between curatorial and artistic composition is

445 Martha Buskirk, *The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art*, 56.

446 See also: V&A Museum, accessed March 20, 2014, <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O166629/still-life-2-bottles-goblet-still-life-hanssen-pigott-gwyn/>. It argues “By referring deliberately to fine art traditions, Hanssen-Pigott changes the context in which her work is seen. A group of useful domestic pots becomes a single work of art.”

flattened: a type of re-authoring that has led Lord to describe museums as “dangerous places.”⁴⁴⁷

Although Lord and Hanssen-Pigott have worked in series, focusing on the nuanced differences between works, they maintained a distance from the mechanical production of their component parts.⁴⁴⁸ Pop and Minimalist art had accorded serial production an established place in fine art practice by the 1960s and debate about authenticity, copying, simulacra and surrogacy dominated contemporary art discourse in the 1980s, yet it was only in the 1990s that ceramic practitioners began to engage with the referential potential of multiple production. These works initially focused on repetition in craft-based batch production, rather than mechanical replication: the focus of *(Un) Limited – Change and Diversity in Contemporary International Craft*: an exhibition held at the Crafts Council Gallery in 1999.

(Un) Limited marked the first UK showing of the work of Piet Stockmans: a Belgian practitioner who had been working with ceramic multiples since the 1980s. He presented a work from 1983, which was comprised of thousands of white bowls with blue rims, on the gallery floor. Another work *It's the wind '99* featured 500 torn blue and white hemispheres on a wall; massing together as they reached the corner of the room. The overall impression of undulating waves of colour prompted a consideration of the phenomenological relationship between the visitor's body, the space and the work, prompting an analogy with minimalist sculpture. However, whilst artists such as Judd forced a consideration of contingency by effacing the physical traces of subjectivity from repeated forms, Stockmans retained them. The subtle variations in colour

447 Dawn Ades, *Andrew Lord* (Milton Keynes: Milton Keynes Gallery, 2010), 19. Describing the treatment of his work at the Museum of Fine Art in Houston, Lord claimed, “The museum effectively removed the artist and re-authored the work in a way, incidentally, that I don't think would happen with painting.”

448 Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: Art and Theory at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, Mass; London: MIT Press, 1996), 63. In a similar vein, Hal Foster has argued that art first became abstract through seriality on the basis of pictorial ordering, rather than technical production.

created an impression of individuality within the mass, rather than uniformity or serial progression.

Stockmans asserted that “the real meaning lies in the making itself...the physical experience, the simple interference with the matter.”⁴⁴⁹ In doing so he forwarded a view of the dichotomous mind/body relationship that was at odds with the contemporary notion of the emancipated spectator as well as providing a subjective explanation that conflicted with the public nature of his work. His approach might be seen as an instance of what Mel Bochner described as the serial attitude – “A concern with how order of a specific type is manifest,” as seen in Andre’s modular floor pieces or Warhol’s soup cans.⁴⁵⁰ Viewed within the Crafts Council Gallery, the connection to the rhythm of repetition throwing might be apparent to the initiated. However, if Stockmans’ works are viewed according to Bochner’s model, the notion of seriality as an ordering principal overrides the value of the individual components and, thus, the individual craft object.

Glen R. Brown has argued that:

No longer to be regarded as simply a consequence of efficiency in the production of utilitarian wares, ceramics multiplicity has served in an increasing number of instances to introduce a kind of conceptual potential to the ceramic object.⁴⁵¹

However, artists from Marcel Duchamp to those in *Vessel* had demonstrated that all objects, ceramic or otherwise, had conceptual potential. Although curator Emmanuel Cooper described Stockmans’ works as “sculptural installations” they do not demand the presence of an embodied viewer: something that Clare Bishop regards as a defining characteristic of installation.⁴⁵² His description might, therefore, be viewed as an attempt to

449 Crafts Council, *(Un) limited: Repetition and Change in International Craft* (London: Crafts Council, 1999): 52.

450 Mel Bochner, “The Serial Attitude,” *Artforum* 6, no. 4 (1967): 28.

451 Glen R Brown, “Multiplicity, Ambivalence and Ceramics Installation Art,” *Ceramics: Art and Perception*, no. 54 (2003): 4-8.

452 Crafts Council, *(Un) limited: Repetition and Change in International Craft*, 52; Clare Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History* (London: Tate Publishing; 2005): 37.

accrue greater cultural capital to the work: installation was a dominant mode of artist practice and embedded in both the market and museum by this stage.

Unsurprisingly, given it allowed potters to position their work as sculpture or installation art without altering their core practice, the formal relationship between ceramics and repetition in minimalist sculpture proved of greater concern to the ceramic field than more expanded forms of practice in subsequent years. The 1990s saw a number of potters who produced white porcelain rise to prominence: a development that the V&A addressed in *The New White: Contemporary Studio Porcelain* (1999).⁴⁵³ Located in the twentieth century galleries' *Design Now* room, the exhibition included five table settings where the work of self-declared potters such as Julian Stair was shown alongside Alvar Aalto furniture and David Mellor tableware. The pots were inserted tableaux that encouraged a reading of the designed interior as a whole. Indeed, Britton described the works' sympathy with the move towards minimalist style in the home.⁴⁵⁴ However, De Waal, whose work *A Long Line West (Cargo No. 8)* – a collection of lidded storage jars arranged to highlight undulations in form and tone – was included in the exhibition, subsequently decried this style-oriented approach to minimalism, arguing for its continued relevance as an artistic movement.⁴⁵⁵

De Waal's grouped works set in train several iterations of the serial attitude. As Stockmans' addressed, repetition is a feature of ceramic batch production and the discourse around studio pottery, with Leach and Yanagi linking the repetitive action of throwing to the suppression of the ego.⁴⁵⁶ Minimalist sculptor Donald Judd and his contemporaries, such as Sol le Witt, also used repetition and uniform finish to reduce individual forms to

453 Rosemary Hill, "The New White," *Crafts*, no. 157 (1999): 16. Hill read 'the new white' as a movement.

454 Alison Britton, "Overthrowing Tradition," *Interpreting Ceramics*, no. 2 (2001), accessed December 12, 2013, <http://interpretingceramics.com/issue002/overthrowingtradition.htm>.

455 Edmund De Waal, "To Say the Least," *Crafts*, no. 169 (2001): 44-45.

456 Sōetsu Yanagi, *The Unknown Craftsman: A Japanese Insight into Beauty*, 197-215; Bernard Leach, *A Potter's Book*, 1-27.

compositional elements: a comparison that Adamson made in the catalogue that accompanied another of De Waal's works at the V&A: *Signs & Wonders* (2009) [fig. 29].⁴⁵⁷

As reviewer David Whiting noted the turn to white encouraged a focus on form.⁴⁵⁸ This was a propensity that Cecile Johnson-Soliz, whose work *Eight Vases 1990-1991* was reproduced in *Ceramic Review* in 1991, had long capitalized upon, using whiteness to strip vessels of their specificity.⁴⁵⁹ She and De Waal both work with grouped vessels and have incorporated physical framing devices into their work, limiting the potential for curatorial misappropriation that dogged Lord. However, despite formal similarities, a comparison of *Signs & Wonders* and Johnson-Soliz's *Twenty Eight Pitchers* (1994-6) reveals different attitudes to the object-context relationship.

In *Twenty Eight Pitchers* Johnson-Soliz replicated and re-worked the forms of museum objects from the National Museum Wales. The pitchers were hand coiled, sanded to achieve a matt finish, and fired at a low temperature to create uniformity. However, each had a slightly different form and they contained irregularities that conflicted with their smooth surfaces. Additionally, pink veining was apparent on closer inspection lending them the appearance of marble. The viewer's initial impressions were challenged on scrutiny, creating a dialectic between the lowly status of the mass produced ceramic vessel and the elevated position of the marble sculpture, the fragility of ceramics and the monumental weight of marble, the conceptual bent of the readymade and the craft associations of the handmade. Within this the objects had a totemic potential - like Lord's vessels, they were representations.

457 Glenn Adamson, "You are Here," in *Signs & Wonders – Edmund de Waal and the V&A Ceramics Galleries*, eds. Glenn Adamson, Edmund de Waal and Alun Graves (London: V&A Publishing, 2009), 32-47.

458 David Whiting, "The New White: Contemporary Studio Porcelain," *Crafts*, no. 160 (1999): 52.

459 Marco Livingstone, "Pots Go Pop," *Ceramic Review*, no 132 (1991): 40. The article was written by the curator of the exhibition *Objects for the Ideal Home: The Legacy of Pop Art*, which was held at the Serpentine Gallery that year and featured Cecile Johnson-Soliz's work – then under the name Cecile Johnson.

The relationship between display and perception was central to *Twenty Eight Pitchers*: the shelving unit that housed the work echoed those in the nearby ceramics galleries, yet there was no glass and the visitor was afforded the space to walk around the objects as they were with sculpture [fig. 30]. Alternating between the pictorial perspectives accorded to the other ceramic vessels in the museum and the three dimensional, but always partial, views accorded on circulation the visitor was, again, torn between preconception and experience.

Like Johnson-Soliz, De Waal drew upon a collection – that of the V&A – in order to examine perceptions of objects within museums. However, whilst the viewer could orient themselves around *Twenty Eight Pitchers*, De Waal's *Signs & Wonders* was housed overhead within a circular red aluminium shelf sited in the dome in the heart of the museum. The shelf was lined with 425 Limoges porcelain vessels cloaked in white, celadon and grey glazes, which De Waal produced in response to his memories of viewing specific objects in the V&A's old ceramics galleries. A permanent commission to mark the renovation of those galleries, it was both part of and a reflection upon the collection and the museum that housed it. Presiding over the new contemporary ceramics gallery, which curator Alun Graves described as “a platform for current practice, a vote of confidence in the adventurous journey that the discipline has taken in recent years” yet, denied the opportunity to physically occupy the main gallery space as more temporary works like Stockmans' had, *Signs & Wonders* also showed the limitations of that platform.⁴⁶⁰

Positioning the work high above the gallery, De Waal worked within the limits of the space he was given, aiming to create a visual blurring, which was akin to the distancing effect that glass interposes between the viewer and museum objects.⁴⁶¹ Whilst Johnson-Soliz's archetypal vessels disturbed

460 Alun Graves, “From A to B,” in *Signs & Wonders – Edmund de Waal and the V&A Ceramics Galleries*, 12.

461 Edmund De Waal, “Signs & Wonders” in *Signs & Wonders – Edmund de Waal and the V&A Ceramics Galleries*, 14-31.

expectations on close inspection, *Signs & Wonders*, like Astbury's *Sky Tunnel*, frustrated attempts at scrutiny. Given backstamps and details that only a privileged few would ever see it also gestured to the collections that were not on display. By making visual reference to Judd's familiar formal vocabulary De Waal (or, perhaps, Adamson's catalogue essay) may have created an expectation of uniformity in the minds of the art historically informed visitors who were his target audience. Whereas Judd outsourced the production of each uniform component of the work in order to deny any connection with representation or subjectivity, de Waal made his by hand to retain exactly those values. Nonetheless, as Harrod observed, visitors would only know this by reading the accompanying text.⁴⁶²

The thrown multiple vessel is not the only multiple form with ceramic associations – an issue addressed in more detail in the next chapter in relation to industrial production. Nor is the imposition of a tight frame, whether plinth, shelf or grouping, necessarily the best way to weave new narratives about ceramics. As Slee demonstrated in his work *Panorama* (2002), not making a clear statement, but leaving visitors to make their own Ranciérian poem through objects can also challenge the focus on authorial meaning that fixes a work in categories such as ceramics or craft.

Initially exhibited at Tate St Ives in 2002, Slee exploited the emotional resonance of familiar objects, creating a sea of brightly coloured and glazed logs, ducks, planes, which might easily be regarded as domestic ornaments. He proposed that his 'arrangement' of over one hundred appropriated and hand-made parts, "formed a narrative of the imagination that could be read from any point, challenging any linear reading or sequence."⁴⁶³ Whilst his juxtapositions

462 Tanya Harrod, "Out of the Studio, or, Do We Make Better Work in Unusual Conditions" Eleventh Annual Dorothy Wilson Perkins Lecture, Schein-Joseph International Museum of Ceramic Art at Alfred University, November 5, 2009

463 "Panorama, (2003)," University of the Arts, London, 2009, accessed April 12, 2014, <http://ualresearchonline.arts.ac.uk/929/>. The title was chosen not just because of the sweep of the showcase but to present a continuously passing scene that did not rely on a central, classical viewpoint.

suggested narratives, the density and ambiguous focus of the work encouraged visitors to weave their own stories. Lesley Jackson, reviewing it in *Crafts*, likened the St Ives display, in the curved 'crafts' case facing the bay, to a historical diorama, but a later reconfiguration, shown at Ruthin Craft Centre, to a military campaign, orchestrated by Slee, as well as the aftermath of an explosion with the debris arranged across a low plinth as though bobbing in water.⁴⁶⁴

Whilst the circular format of De Waal's *Signs & Wonders* also permitted different entry and exit points and described similar approaches to meaning making within the gallery it privileged his own processes of selection and composition, rather than inviting visitors to draw their own. Highlighting the intentional uselessness of his work through the use of a fixed frame, he separated his grouped works from the decontextualized utilitarian forms in the museums' collections. In doing so he perpetuated the hierarchical distinction – in terms of both financial and cultural capital, between the status of the utilitarian ceramic form as subject or component of an artwork and as an artwork in its own right. Although De Waal stresses that he is a potter, *Signs & Wonders* signalled loftier ambitions: his work may have incorporated pots, but the big red shelf, like a gigantic signature, subsumed them to his authorial conception. However, like Lord, Hanssen-Pigott and Stockmans, rather than establishing raising the art status of pottery, it made them the subject of works that adopted established fine art formats. Slee, instead, devolved authorship to the spectator, revelling in the referential value of ceramics in a manner that reflected his irreverent approach to disciplinary boundaries.

4. House and home

464 Lesley Jackson, "Richard Slee – Panorama," *Crafts*, no. 184 (2003): 60.

As Christopher Reed has argued, the domestic was positioned as the antithesis of modernist art practice.⁴⁶⁵ Associated with the feminine, the utilitarian, the everyday and the accessible – all of which pottery had strong historical connections to – it is, therefore, at the heart of many of the issues of prestige and status that surround ceramics. Consequently, many ceramists, including those addressed above, have employed gestures of showing that distanced them from the home.

Although some potters in the early twentieth century showed in art gallery spaces, whose display techniques privileged the idea of the autonomous artwork, from the 1930s craft galleries such as Muriel Rose's Little Gallery also showed contemporary ceramics within idealised middle class interiors. Publications from Leach's *A Potter's Book* and Edward Lucie-Smith's *World of the Makers* (1975) to *Ceramic Review* and *Crafts* focused on the life of the potter as well. De Waal has argued that both strategies "created the powerful impression that the authentic life of the object was best exemplified by the life of the artists" and, by extension, the domestic.⁴⁶⁶ Whilst this suited those concerned with utilitarian wares, studio ceramists who wanted to establish their work as art – whether as an art form, like Britton, or fine art, like Lord – battled to get their work shown in modernist gallery spaces.⁴⁶⁷

The increased public profile of interior design in the 1980s, as addressed in chapter two, resulted in a number of consumption-led exhibitions; for example, the Crafts Council's touring exhibition *The New Spirit in Craft and Design* (1987), which showcased a range of ceramic objects, including a subtly patterned Jennifer Lee hand-built stoneware pot, Christine Constant's spiked raku fired pots, Rosa Nguyen-Duc-Quy's press-moulded platters with organic designs, and Robert Cooper's *Coming Together* – an ethnographic-looking legged stoneware container, in room sets alongside works in a variety of other

465 Christopher Reed, *Not at Home: The Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996), 7-17.

466 Edmund De Waal, "Cultured Living," *Ceramic Review*, no. 212 (2005): 41-43.

467 Tanya Harrod, "Out of the Studio, Or Do We Make Better Work in Unusual Conditions?"

media. Promoting a new generation, which Dormer suggested was “leering at the face of conventional design,” the exhibition marketed these objects, for sale at between £160 and £585, as luxury accessories to the new metropolitan lifestyles of the time.⁴⁶⁸ There were also more critical perspectives, such as *Our Domestic Landscape: Your Home – Whose Choice?* (1986).⁴⁶⁹ And as recently as 1993, Britton and Margetts considered using the title ‘The Undomesticated Product’ for the exhibition that was ultimately titled *The Raw and the Cooked*, thus demonstrating a continued anxiety about the impact that associations with the home could have on their claims for the art status of various forms of ceramic practice.⁴⁷⁰

Despite these fears, within a decade of that exhibition the house and home were to occupy increasingly prominent positions within ceramic practice. However, they were houses particularly suited to display, rather than use. The owners of Britain’s stately homes were once great patrons of contemporary craftspeople. This tradition has continued at a number of sites such as Chatsworth House, where the Devonshire family and The Chatsworth House Trust have become renowned for high-profile commissions. Yet, many of these grand buildings were sold off in the twentieth century and passed into the hands of organisations such as The National Trust and English Heritage whereupon their role in this regard diminished. Their contents usually auctioned off, the houses were often filled with objects from a specific historic period, which had no connection to the site or history of the house. Between 1986 and 2001 The National Trust commissioned and exhibited contemporary drawings and paintings within their properties in association with the Arts Council through the Foundation for Art programme, but it was only in 2009

468 Peter Dormer, “The Overthrow of the Organ Grinders: An Introduction to the New Spirit in Craft and Design,” in *The New Spirit in Craft & Design*, 3; Crafts Council, *Exhibits and Price List – The New Spirit in Craft and Design* (London: Crafts Council, 1987).

469 Virginia Tandy, “Preface,” in *Our Domestic Landscape. Your Home – Whose Choice?* 3.

470 Alison Britton and Martina Margetts, “Draft exhibition proposal,” *The Raw and the Cooked collection*. Oxford: Modern Art Oxford archive, about 1991.

with *Trust New Art*, a further partnership with Arts Council England, that they adopted a more wholehearted commitment to crafts commissioning. English Heritage originally took up the mantle in 1996, launching *Living at Belsay*: the first in a series of projects that brought contemporary furniture into the historic house space at Belsay Hall, Northumberland.

When English Heritage took over the management of Belsay Hall it was unfurnished and the vast empty spaces posed a challenge to curators. However, rather than acquiring generic 'period' objects through which to tell stories they decided to explore alternative ways of interpreting the site. This gave them greater freedom to focus on the specific history of the site and to address change across time. The project - the brainchild of Timandra Gustafson - was tied to celebrations for the Year of the Visual Arts in the North and reflected on how Belsay's owners had acted as patrons to craftspeople in the past. It was intended to stimulate public appreciation of the crafts and to lead to further commissions, with the furniture later sold at public auction.⁴⁷¹ Sir Jocelyn Stevens cvo, Chair of English Heritage proposed, "Heritage organisations are often suspected of being obsessed with the past. *Living at Belsay* demonstrates English Heritage's role of promoting the best of the present for the future, which is, after all, tomorrow's heritage."⁴⁷²

The works were chosen to reflect the rooms' intended use. Whilst the furniture and large textile pieces provided the focus of most rooms, ceramic objects were spread throughout the house. These included Kate Malone's *Blue Lady Gourd* and *Pineapple on Fire*, two glazed ceramic jugs by Peter Sharpe, Philip Elgin's *Venus et Amour* and *Standing Female Nude and Pot* and three standing figures by Claire Curneen in the dining room; twelve ceramic arrows of varying size in the library and a tiled fireplace in the drawing room - both

471 Sir Jocelyn Stevens, James J. Moore, Paddy Killer et al. *Living at Belsay. A Contemporary Approach to Furnishing a Historic House* (Northumberland, Northumberland County Council: 1996), n.p.

472 Sir Jocelyn Stevens, cvo, "Foreword," in *Living at Belsay. A Contemporary Approach to Furnishing a Historic House* n.p.

works by Paul Scott. Further items in the drawing room included a boat and a mantle clock by Bernadette Herman, two seafood platters by Andrew Wilson and a dinner plate, hors d'oeuvre tray and a fruit bowl by Morgen Hall. This contextual approach made a bridge between the formal living spaces of the historic house and visitors' contemporary lives. It brought ceramic objects into dialogue with those in other media and provided an opportunity to engage with the ornamental, as well as the utilitarian, role of ceramics. It also questioned the transition of many ceramic objects from kiln to display case.⁴⁷³ In a reversal of the traditional trajectory of objects within the museum these objects were not severed from daily life, but were poised at the start of their biographies. As reviewer Liz Taylor suggested, it also provided an opportunity to purchase an "antique of the future."⁴⁷⁴ These were 'museum quality' pieces, but available to own – albeit at a price.

Whilst the works in *Living at Belsay* were intended for use in real homes many subsequent projects have, like the collections interventions discussed in the previous chapter, served an interpretative function. *Modern Home: An Intervention by Edmund de Waal* (1999) was one of the most high-profile examples that involved ceramics. Originally invited to produce a work in response to Dartington Hall Trust's collection, De Waal's interest in modernist architecture drew him to the house instead.⁴⁷⁵ Despite curator Hilary Williams's claim that "The new pots, made specifically for the project, carry with them a

473 Michael Harrison, "Foreword," in *Edmund de Waal at Kettle's Yard, Mima and Elsewhere*, eds. Edmund de Waal, James Beighton and Elizabeth Fisher (Cambridge; Middlesbrough: Kettle's Yard and Mima), 7. As Michael Harrison has observed, the autographed, studio pot was being transferred virtually from kiln to museum case by the time De Waal began to practice.

474 Liz Taylor, "Antiques of the Future," *The Herald (Scotland)*, 19 October, 1996, accessed February 6, 2013. <http://www.heraldsotland.com/sport/spl/aberdeen/antiques-of-the-future-1.430573>.

475 Edmund de Waal and Michael Tooby, *Modern Home: An Intervention by Edmund de Waal at High Cross House* (Totnes, Devon: The Dartington Hall Trust, 1999), 3. The Dartington Trust, an experimental educational establishment had strong links to Leach, on whom De Waal had just published a book.

resonance of High Cross House as a home, a domestic space, as well as a gallery or museum," it embraced the modern and distanced pottery from the home.⁴⁷⁶

Arguing that the focus on visual harmony within modernist architecture meant that such houses were like museums from the outset, De Waal embraced their ability to aestheticise objects, positioning groups of his cylindrical pots around the house to create formal dialogues with space and light [fig. 31]. Although he described *Modern Home* as "a kind of very personal conversation with iconic modernism about pots and where they can belong..." it was less a conversation and more a revisionist history, as he revealed by closing that sentence with "...not just at home. That's all."⁴⁷⁷ Whilst De Waal claimed "objects, like people, are cussed and problematic, in museums they stay still," Bal has suggested that "the success or failure of expository activity is not a measure of what one person "wants to say," but what a community and its subjects think, feel or experience to be the consequence of the exposition."⁴⁷⁸ Framing his works within the house-as-museum, De Waal may have warded off attempts to physically insert his vessels into alternative narratives, but he couldn't fix the response of that interpretative community.

In 2004, ceramist Nicholas Rena remarked upon the growing number of artistic projects that, like *Modern Home*, rendered household objects "out of place."⁴⁷⁹ One of the exhibitions that Rena cited was *The Uncanny Room* (2002), curated by Tessa Peters and Janice West and shown at Pitzhanger Manor, London and The Bowes Museum, County Durham. Proceeding from an interest in artworks that engaged with Freud's notion of the uncanny, the curators exploited the discursive potential of the exhibition format to explore the connotations of the German word for uncanny – 'unheimlich,' and its relationship to both the homely and its opposite, the unhomely.⁴⁸⁰ What Claire

476 Ibid., 3.

477 Ibid., 8.

478 Mieke Bal, *Double Exposures. The Subject of Cultural Analysis*, 8.

479 Nicholas Rena, "Domestic (F)utility" *Crafts*, no. 189 (2004): 54-55.

480 Tessa Peters and Janice West, "From the Uncanny Room to the House of Words," in *The Go-Between: Artist as Mediator Between Collections and Audiences*, vol. 1, ed. National Museum, Wales

Robins might label a “poetic” intervention, for Peters, the exhibition provided an opportunity to challenge the association between applied arts objects and the homely, exploring their unsettling potential.⁴⁸¹ Siting existing works, which they felt engaged with the uncanny, around Pitzhanger Manor, West and Peters avoided using labels, so that visitors would experience a shudder on encountering them. Expecting predictable historic artefacts, they were confronted with works such as Hans Stofer’s cup, which was lined with dead wasps and transformed the ultimate symbol of domestic comfort into something viscerally repellent. Other works evoked other repressed fears associated with domesticity: Slee’s *Evil One* sat curled in front of a mirror that reflected its lack of facial features, whilst his phallic *Bedroom Snake* wove its way across the floor of the drawing room at Pitzhanger suggesting a dark sexual undercurrent [fig. 32].

Reed has suggested that the manifest antagonism towards the home in the Dadaists and Surrealists’ explorations of the uncanny in the early twentieth century asserted their avant-garde status.⁴⁸² *The Uncanny Room* might, similarly, be regarded as an attempt to raise the status of craft objects by demonstrating their subversive potential. Yet Peters’ assertion that:

On one level the exhibition subverts the popular conception that the most laudable objective of the craft object lies in its combination of beauty and utility, thus fulfilling the role of enriching our everyday lives.⁴⁸³

also indicated a concern with overturning the restrictive view perpetuated by craft critics such as Peter Dormer, who argued that the crafts should not be

(Cardiff: National Museum Wales, 2009), 18-29. In particular, they were inspired by Anthony Vidler and Jon Bird’s texts in James Lingwood, ed. *Rachel Whiteread’s House* (London: Phaidon, 1995).

481 Clare Robins, *Curious Lessons in the Museum: The Pedagogic Potential of Artists Interventions*, 2. Tessa Peters, “Introduction: The Uncanny Room,” in *The Uncanny Room*, eds. Tessa Peters and Janice West (London: Luminous Books), 5.

482 Christopher Reed, *Contemporary Art and the Home* (Oxford: Berg, 2002), 39.

483 Tessa Peters, “Introduction. The Uncanny Room,” 5.

questioning, but offer joy and solace.⁴⁸⁴ Regarded thus, it might be viewed as a gesture of showing that demonstrated that such readings were not a condition of using craft media, but a function of framing. Providing cues that prompted visitors to fill in the gaps using their own memories, it facilitated the production of meanings, instead of attempting to relay them.

Whilst *The Uncanny Room* used the historic house as a stage for theoretical explorations, others have sought to draw out the specific, and often hidden, histories of historic houses. As Monica Risnicoff de Gorgas has maintained: "More than a monument that celebrates a lost past, a historic house is seen as a place where people have lived out their life."⁴⁸⁵ Certainly, whilst Museummaker - a programme piloted in museums in the East Midlands between 2005 and 2008 and rolled out to include a number of historic house in 2009 - had the tagline "Unlocking the creative potential of museum collections," many artists also responded to how objects were embedded in the histories of the sites themselves.⁴⁸⁶

Such commissions reflected a growing concern with telling stories about the lives of those that lived and worked in historic buildings, rather than replicating the elite interests of their former owners, which included the accumulation of decorative arts objects.⁴⁸⁷ This is the premise at the core of the

484 Peter Dormer, Notebook re: ceramics exhibition ICA Spring '85. Preliminary ideas. Attn: Declan McGonagle, ICA collection, 955/7/7/29, Tate archive, London. This view was also reflected in Antony Gormley's conversation in the *A Secret History of Clay* catalogue, where he proposed that art and craft should not be confused because art questions the world and makes life more complicated, whereas craft reconciles the needs of human life and the environment around it. Anthony Gormley and James Putnam, "In Conversation," in *A Secret History of Clay: From Gauguin to Gormley*, eds. Edmund De Waal and Simon Groom (London: Tate Publishing, 2004), 84.

485 Monica Risnicoff de Gorgas, "Reality as illusion, the historic houses that become museums," *Museum International*, no. 210 (2001): 10.

486 These included Twomey, who installed 3,500 black ceramic butterflies around Brighton's Royal Pavilion for *A Dark Day in Paradise* (2010), reflecting on the vulgarity of conspicuous consumption, the fleeting nature of life and the relative value of the accumulated goods that survive us.

487 Emma Barker, "Heritage and the Country House," in *Contemporary Cultures of Display*, ed. Emma Barker (New Haven; London: Yale University Press in Association with The Open University, 1999), 200-228. The National Trust faced criticisms that it replicated the elitist

work of the Unravelled arts organisation, which has produced exhibitions that occupy four historic houses to date: Preston Manor (2010); Nymans House and Garden (2012); The Vyne (2013) and Uppark (2014). The organisation issues open calls for proposals for artworks that elucidate histories and narratives related to the house and evoke a sense of place, paring them down to create a balance of ideas and media.⁴⁸⁸ Emptied of the lives that once animated them, Unravelled seek to imbue the houses with contemporary relevance. Outcomes have included a number of works that employ ceramics, from Penny Green's *Incident in the North East Corridor* and founder member Matt Smith's *Bulldog* at Preston Manor and Guy Holder's *Field of Vision* at Nymans to Andrew Burton's *Vessels* at Uppark. Like *Modern Home* and *The Uncanny Room*, Unravelled stressed that they worked with "artists or makers using or subverting the notion of craft in extreme and conceptual ways."⁴⁸⁹ However, whilst the aforementioned exhibitions attempted to show how context can shape the meanings of ceramics or craft works, here the reverse was true: the works served to re-frame the context for contemporary audiences.

In historic houses, utilitarian and ornamental objects compete with paintings as well as overall decorative schemes. As they tend to be perceived as adjuncts to the art and furnishings, they are often unlabelled. Reviewer Liz Farrelly remarked that this made it difficult to locate the exhibits in *Unravelling the Manor House*, suggesting that they fought for attention away from the white cube space.⁴⁹⁰ However, as *The Uncanny Room* showed, the tension between integration and the unexpected can be fruitful: something that Smith's *Bulldog* also exemplified.

interests of the houses' former owners and that there was a bland and standardised National Trust look.

488 Unravelled Arts, "Unravelled Press Release 2011," Unravelled Arts, 2011, accessed April 6, 2012, <http://unravelled.org.uk/press-pages>.

489 Unravelled Arts, "Unravelling the Vyne brief," Unravelled Arts, accessed March 3, 2012, [http://unravelled.org.uk/downloads/Unravelling the Vyne Brief.pdf](http://unravelled.org.uk/downloads/Unravelling%20the%20Vyne%20Brief.pdf).

490 Liz Farrelly, "The Discrete Charm of the Intervention," *Crafts*, no. 225, (2010): 57.

The work comprised a number of red bulldogs, arranged in a dresser in the dining room at Preston Manor amongst former occupant Ellen Thomas-Stanford's collection of 124 white Buddhist Chinese 'Dogs of Fo'. Detached from their original context, in which they guarded temples and were thought to protect against evil spirits, Thomas-Stanford's Dogs were denuded of their totemic power and reduced to 'conversation pieces' to discuss over dinner. This was an idea that Smith played upon to address the racial stereotypes perpetuated through contemporary gossip. His dogs - a symbol of Britishness - formed a red cross in the centre of the display, conjuring associations with the English flag, yet they were made from American moulds and coated with red spray paint designed for vehicles made by Japanese firm Honda. Questioning received notions about nationality, unity and division, the work had the potential to transform perceptions that museums house "objects to which the observer no longer has a vital relationship and which are in the process of dying," to offer an understanding of "the past as part of the present."⁴⁹¹ Furthermore, preconceptions about the role of ceramics were challenged not through the subject matter of the work, but through the complex layering within it.

Tellingly, Smith formerly worked as a curator and undertook ceramics training because he was interested in the resonance of ceramic objects. He, therefore, saw ceramics as a means of addressing other issues, rather than trying to give his object-making practice conceptual import.

5. Site and situation

The forms of works such as Smith's *Bulldogs* and De Waal's *Modern Home* and *Signs & Wonders* were contingent on the material, historical and social contours of individual museum sites. They, therefore, provided fertile ground for those

⁴⁹¹ Théodor Adorno, "Valéry Proust Museum" in *Prisms* trans. Samuel M. Weber (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1988), 175; Mieke Bal, *The Practice of Cultural Analysis*, 1.

who produced works that engaged with aspects of ceramic heritage that had been marginalised in the pursuit of fine art status. However, site-specificity was a relatively recent concern within the discourse around studio ceramic practice. In the 1980s, ceramic practitioners were commissioned to produce public artworks, often in new buildings, through projects such as Percent for Art in the 1980s and *Clay Sculpture*, which invited artists to engage with the physical context of Yorkshire Sculpture Park, was a rare opportunity. Nonetheless, as Harrod has observed, there was a notable retreat from public and architectural contexts in this period.⁴⁹² This may be attributed to the prime focus on the discrete object and the challenge that site-specificity, posed to the notion of medium specificity. As Serra observed:

Unlike modernist works that give the illusion of being autonomous from their surroundings and which function critically only in relation to the language of their own medium, site-specific works emphasise the comparison between two separate languages and can therefore use the language of one to criticise the other.⁴⁹³

By contrast, in post-studio art practice, museums and galleries – along with other sites – became an integral part of works' form and content. At Stoke-on-Trent City Museum and Art Gallery drawn to the city's industrial past, artists who worked in a site-specific manner chose to employ ceramics in all its forms. These projects included Bill Fitzgibbons' *This is Stoke on Trent* (1981), which used local bricks from Stoke on Trent and casts of the buildings in his home city of St Louis in America. Exhibiting them together, Fitzgibbons created a dialogue between the two cities and their architectural ceramics.⁴⁹⁴ Others, such as Those Environmental Artist's *Living Space at Stoke* (1991), embraced the industrial and domestic connotations of ceramics. During their seventeen-day

492 Alison Britton and Simon Olding, eds. *Three by One*, 24. Harrod's 1989 article *The Forgotten '50s* also highlighted the ways in which Picassoettes' had created works that were specifically tailored to contexts such as coffee bars.

493 Clara Weyergraf Serra and Martha Buskirk, eds. *The Destruction of Tilted Arc* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1991), 12.

494 Robert W. Duffy, "Breaking Ground for Artist Exchange," *St Louis Post Dispatch*, May 3, 1981, 5.

residency, the group built the structure of a house using scaffolding, wire mesh and wood, clad with unglazed ceramic objects donated by Royal Doulton [fig. 33]. They then projected slides that reflected different models of domestic life, from the homes of local people to images from interior design magazines and museum sets.⁴⁹⁵

The dialogic emphasis of these works was remote from the internally-focused discourse around studio ceramics. However, the town of St Ives in Cornwall, the home of the Leach Pottery, founded by Leach and Hamada in 1920, is also home to a branch of the Tate gallery that has a distinct mission to reflect the history of the locale. Consequently, it has commissioned a number of site-specific works, including those by ceramic practitioners, such as Kosho Ito. Like Fitzgibbons, Ito made a connection between the site of the work and a site in his own country. The first part of Ito's 2002 work *VIRUS - Sea Folds* was shown in the gallery's curved 'craft showcase,' which was originally designed to house studio pottery by local makers such as Bernard Leach. He filled the case with approximately two thousand folded forms, comprised of Shigaraki clay, some combined with crushed shells from the seashore near his home in his native Japan. Transported from East to West, it created a material link between St Ives and the town of Mashiko in Japan, which paralleled the friendship and exchange between Leach and his long-term collaborator Shoji Hamada who had a workshop there.

Ito's work, whose overlapping folds invaded the vitrine, was formally site-specific: it was created for the exhibition space. Additionally, it worked in dialogue not only with the landscape and its counterpart *VIRUS: Earth Folds*, which occupied the courtyard, but with works by Naum Gabo and Richard Long, who shared the exhibition. Within such works, which evolved from efforts to "relocate meaning from within the art object to the contingencies of its context," clay forms just one element of the overall form.

495 City Museum and Art Gallery, *Those Environmental Artists* (Stoke-on-Trent: City Museum and Art Gallery, 1991).

Although the works discussed so far were in place for the duration of specific exhibitions and were not re-created, Miwon Kwon has argued that, rather than having an indexical relationship to site:

...the distinguishing characteristic of today's site-oriented art is the way in which the art work's relationship to the actuality of a location (as site) and the social conditions of the institutional frame (as site) are both subordinate to a discursively determined site that is delineated as a field of knowledge, intellectual debate or cultural exchange.⁴⁹⁶

She has proposed that the work generates such a site, which is then "verified by its convergence with an existing discursive formation."⁴⁹⁷

This process can be observed in Conrad Atkinson's *Mining Culture* series. Since 1966, Atkinson has used ceramic landmines to create interventions in museums and galleries [fig. 34].⁴⁹⁸ Using the form of cheap decorative wares, Atkinson drew an analogy between the mass production of such objects and these tools of murder; the values of high culture and the low price placed on life. For *Mining Arts* (1999) he interspersed ceramic replicas of different types of landmines, between the collection displays at Liverpool's Walker Art Gallery. The objects themselves were produced in various locations and they were located in the museum. Within the museum site, they were inserted into another site – the framework provided for the collections displays. They were also part of the Liverpool Biennial, which took the city as site. However, the most important site for the artist was discursive – it created a space in which to engage people with global anti-landmine campaigns.

By contrast, when applied to the work of trained ceramists, Kwon's model of site-specificity highlights the limitations of medium-first thinking. Clare Twomey's *Consciousness/Conscience* (2001-2015) exemplifies this

496 Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004): 26.

497 Ibid., 26.

498 Ceramicist Paul Scott helped Atkinson – a trained painter – to model and print his earliest works in this vein. Moira Vincentelli, "Moira Vincentelli interviewing Conrad Atkinson," Aberystwyth Ceramics Collection, accessed 12 November, 2012, <http://www.ceramics-aberystwyth.com/interviews/capg8.htm>.

phenomenon and the issues it poses for those who consistently locate their work within the discourse around ceramics [fig. 35]. The installation premiered at the first World Ceramic Biennial in Incheon, Korea in 2001 and was remade for the Crafts Council's *Approaching Content* exhibition (2003) and Tate Liverpool's *A Secret History of Clay* (2004).⁴⁹⁹ It is comprised of bone china floor tiles, which are placed at strategic points on the gallery floor so that visitors are forced to walk across them if they wish to reach the next part of the exhibition. Initially made by a factory in Korea and later at Royal Crown Derby in the UK to Twomey's specifications – the tiles are designed to collapse underfoot during the process: the temporal unfolding of the work dictated by the visitors' actions.

Twomey has argued that human interaction is central to the validation of *Consciousness/Conscience*, ultimately devolving meaning to the visitor.⁵⁰⁰ However, she sets the parameters of the interaction by selecting the space that the work occupies and the composition of the tiles, so that they shatter differentially under the weight of the visitors' bodies. The sites where the work's effects are felt might, therefore, include the visitors' perceptions and, like conventional site-specific art, to be continuous with the physical site. Alternatively, they may, critics have suggested, spark associations with man's effect on the environment and domestic destruction.⁵⁰¹ Certainly, Twomey's other works, including *Specimen* (2009) have made analogies between the fragility of clay and that of nature. However, the contextual frameworks within which she has located the work complicate such readings.

As addressed earlier, as fine art practices moved away from the discrete, handcrafted object, institutional validation became central to the works'

499 It has also been re-made for the *Fragile* exhibition at National Museum of Wales in 2015, which is just outside the cut-off point for this thesis.

500 Clare Twomey, "On the Cusp," *Ceramic Review*, no. 229 (2008): 46-49.

501 Tony Franks, "From the Real to the Unreal. The Ceramics of Clare Twomey," *Ceramics: Art and Perception*, no. 60 (2005): 9-12. See also James Meyer, "The Functional Site, or the Transformation of Site Specificity," in *Space, Site, Intervention: Situating Installation Art*, ed. Erika Suderburg (Cambridge, Mass; London: MIT Press and The Whitechapel Gallery, 2009): 23-37.

categorisation as art (or non-art).⁵⁰² It might be argued that for Twomey's work, which took the multimedial form of installation art and included ceramic elements that bore none of the traditional signs of craft authorship, its status as ceramics or craft became equally contingent. Shown within a site with environmental associations, such as the Eden project, as *Specimen* was, *Consciousness/Conscience* may have been read in relation to that discursive framework. However, repeatedly shown within frameworks that seek to constitute the object domain of ceramics and subsequently discussed as an example of expanded practice, the discourse around ceramics has become the main site of effect. Accordingly, Cooper, writing about *Consciousness/Conscience* in his book *Contemporary Ceramics* (2009), read the work against craft-based precedents, suggesting Twomey "could to all intents and purposes, have been smashing 10,000 years of ceramic history."⁵⁰³

Unlike works that were originally made for specific sites and then re-made, *Consciousness/Conscience* was not conceived for one physical place, nor was it intended to be an autonomous art object. As addressed in more detail in the next chapter, in such cases, the artists' authorisation to re-make the work becomes paramount and the artist, rather than the site, becomes the main source of meaning.⁵⁰⁴ Kwon has, therefore, proposed that:

...one of the narrative trajectories of all site-oriented projects is consistently aligned with the artist's prior projects executed in other places, generating what might be called another "site" — the exhibition history of an artist, his/her vitae.⁵⁰⁵

Although *Consciousness/Conscience* is something of an anomaly in Twomey's portfolio because it was re-made, her exhibition history charts her trajectory as an itinerant artist, brought in to produce situations that create a

502 Benjamin D. Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962 – 1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," *October* 55 (Winter, 1990): 105-143.

503 Emmanuel Cooper, *Contemporary Ceramics* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2009), 225.

504 Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*, 38.

505 Ibid., 52-3;

sense of place.⁵⁰⁶ The increased attention that the relationship between ceramics and installation art has received since the turn of the millennium has been concurrent with the rise of this mode of practice. Such projects dominate the vitae of Twomey, De Waal and others including Keith Harrison and Phoebe Cummings, who have formed the focus of those discussions. Largely driven by the government and other funding initiatives addressed in chapter two, many of the projects have sought to enlist artists as “agents of change,” who are tasked with making visitors feel like they had a stake in culture and, therefore, society.⁵⁰⁷ However, ceramists have often been asked to do so by re-framing ceramics collections with ceramic objects.

It might be argued that these shifts have opened up new spaces for ceramic practitioners. Certainly, whilst, in 1993, V&A curator Oliver Watson contended: “the museum does not collect large-scale sculpture or installation art, these being in institutional terms the proper domain of the Tate Gallery in London and other museums devoted to contemporary fine art,” a decade later his successor Alun Graves proposed: “In my mind, if ceramic practice forms an important and considered element to a work, whether it be sculpture, installation or performance, then it is appropriate material for the museum to engage with.”⁵⁰⁸ Nonetheless, shifting attitudes to public engagement at the V&A may have shaped Graves’s response. Established in 1999 to “make a visit to the V&A an interactive rather than a passive experience,” the museum’s contemporary programme team had begun to seek ways of using contemporary practice to demonstrate the museum’s popular appeal.

506 Miwon Kwon, “One Place After Another: Notes on Site-Specificity,” 101. Describing the ‘itinerant artist,’ Kwon explains: “If the artist is successful, he or she travels constantly as a freelancer, often working on more than one site-specific project at a time, globe-trotting as a guest, tourist, adventurer, temporary in-house critic, or pseudo ethnographer.”

507 Chris Dorsett, ‘Making Meaning Beyond Display’ in *Museum Materialities*, ed. Sandra H. Dudley (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 241-259.

508 Oliver Watson, *Studio Pottery: The Victoria and Albert Museum Collection* (Oxford: Phaidon Christie’s in association with the Victoria and Albert Museum, 1990); Alun Graves, “Room 138,” *Ceramic Review*, no. 201 (2003): 24.

As both museums and ceramists attempt to reconcile inherited notions of 'ceramics' with the pluralism of contemporary practice, these projects can provide opportunities for both to re-make that category. However, in doing so, they naturalise it and can limit appreciation of the breadth of ceramics as an integrative practice. As Conor Wilson noted in a paper at a recent conference on ceramics and sculpture, Rachel Kneebone, who trained in ceramics (initially at Bristol and then, like Twomey, at the RCA) has successfully framed her work as art. Whilst her delicate porcelain objects might be read as part of the history of ceramic figuration, she is represented by the White Cube Gallery, which is famous for promoting the work of the fine artists in the UK, including Tracey Emin and Damien Hirst. Framed through group exhibitions with a broad range of artists, Kneebone's use of medium becomes a means of creating sculpture, rather than a means of definition. By contrast, as a trained ceramist working within the Ceramics Research Centre: UK, who makes ceramic objects, often addresses ceramics and craft as subjects and whose work is predominantly shown in and addressed through crafts and ceramics centred contexts, Twomey's CV screams medium-specificity, even though she uses multimedial formats such as installation and performance.⁵⁰⁹

A work titled *Trophy* (2006), which Twomey made for *Clay Rocks*, an event in the V&A's Friday Late programme, exemplified this issue.⁵¹⁰ For the work, she dispersed 4,000 birds made from Wedgwood's iconic blue jasper clay throughout the V&A's cast courts and visitors were invited to take a bird as a souvenir of their visit [fig. 36]. Taking home, rather than viewing pieces of Wedgwood in situ, the visitors became co-curators of a dispersed, relationally

509 Such works include *Heirloom* (2004); *Trophy* (2006); *Monument* (2009); *A Dark Day in Paradise* (2010); *Forever* (2010); *Made in China* (2011); *Is it Madness. Is it Beauty* (2011) *Plymouth Porcelain: A New Collection* (2012) and *Piece by Piece* (2014).

510 Twomey took this subject a step further in *Forever* at the Nelson Atkins Museum in Kansas (2010), requiring those that took one of the loving cups she had modelled on an object in the collection to sign a contract that demanded they care for and display it in perpetuity as a museum might.

defined collection, but also, ostensibly, dismantled the installation.⁵¹¹ Her strategy might be compared with relational works such as Félix Gonzáles-Torres's *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)* (1991). Named after his partner, who had recently died from AIDS, the pile was Ross's ideal weight, but as visitors took the sweets, they symbolically re-enacted the effect that the disease had had upon him. However, replenishing the sweets at the artist's request, he was also perpetually re-born. Whilst not as emotionally weighted, Twomey's work, similarly, had to be destroyed in order to gain a new life. Yet, shown at the V&A (albeit outside the ceramics galleries) and with Twomey's ceramic associations, critic Dahn described *Clay Rocks* as "a landmark in the development of a new mode of ceramics practice," arguing that it marked the institutional validation of "conceptual ceramics."⁵¹²

Despite this recuperation, the museum might be seen to offer a way in, as well as a way out of the discourse around ceramics. As Art Historian Helen Potkin has proposed, contemporary art commissioned with an explicit concern with participation, "can be seen as part of the strategy to create distinctiveness and contemporary relevance."⁵¹³ This distinctiveness is not accorded to the work, but to the site or situation that it produces. Through this, the commissioning body can distinguish their venue or event from those of their competitors. Whilst this situation may appear negative, it can insert the works into different histories of exposition, particularly those that centre on museum intervention. Dahn may have claimed the works in *Clay Rocks* for ceramics, but

511 The new owners of the 4,000 blue jasper birds have continued to contact Twomey and the museum. New photographs and narrative accounts of the objects' new lives have arrived as recently as 2012 and in-person feedback continues, thereby extending the exhibition's life and impact. Clare Twomey, in discussion with Alun Graves, *Ceramics in the Expanded Field* symposium, January 10, 2012, V&A Museum.

512 Jo Dahn, "Elastic/Expanding. Contemporary Conceptual Ceramics," in *Extra/Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art*, ed. Maria Elena Buszek (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 2011) 157.

513 Helen Potkin, "In-habiting Site: Contemporary Art Practices Within the Historic(al) Interior," in *Performance, Fashion and the Modern Interior: From the Victorians to Today*, eds. Fiona Fisher, Trevor Keeble, Patricia Lara-Betancourt and Brenda Martin (London and New York; Berg, 2011): 207-219.

museums, commissioning bodies and, first and foremost, the visitors whose experiences they prioritised have claimed them too.

Reframed in papers, such as Dame Liz Forgan's keynote address at the 2012 Arts Council conference *Engaging the Artist's Voice: Museums, galleries and artists working in collaboration* and in Matilda Pye and Linda Sandino's book *Artists Work in Museums: Histories, Interventions, Subjectivities* (2013), the discursive sites generated by ceramists' works are verified against the existing discourse around the artist-museum relationship.⁵¹⁴ As visitors confront the works, they also take their place within the catalogues of their own experiences. Within this framework, the focus shifts away from what objects and artworks are made of to what they can do.

Conclusion

The work of Peacock and Mackness, in particular, had affinities with 'The New British Sculpture' of the 1980s, which saw increased engagement with object, image and metaphor.⁵¹⁵ However, whilst sculptors such as Tony Cragg, Antony Gormley and Richard Deacon who used clay within this idiom have since been included in publications and exhibitions that attempt to locate contemporary ceramic practice, the contribution (and failure) of these trained ceramists has largely been ignored.⁵¹⁶ This could be seen to support Adamson's contention that:

Contemporary artists can safely claim inspiration from well-known fine artists, or from "outsider artists" like [George] Ohr whose presumed lack

514 In her keynote address, Forgan, Chair of the Arts Council, used De Waal's intervention at Waddesdon Manor and Twomey's *Plymouth Porcelain* (2012) as successful examples of artists working with museums. Their discursive mobilisation of site was considered on equal terms with projects such as Perry's *Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman* and Patrick Keiler's *The Robinson Institute*.

515 Clarrie Wallis, "Object and Sculpture," in *The History of British Art 1870 – now*, ed. Chris Stephens (London: Tate Publishing, 2008), 196.

516 For example, Cragg, Gormley and Deacon were shown in *A Secret History of Clay* and *The Raw and the Cooked*. De Waal also included them in *20th Century Ceramics*.

of self-consciousness renders them fair game, but never from the art-wannabes of the studio craft movement.⁵¹⁷

It is an approach that allows organisations with a vested interest in maintaining the distinction of ceramics as a category to avoid discussions of the role that the institutional affiliations of the maker, rather than the materiality of the object, play in determining the discursive framing of their work and, thus, their own complicity in its marginalisation. However, if those who worked in ceramics with sculptural intent in this period were in 'limbo,' it could also be argued that they moved out of this middle ground and back towards 'ceramics,' by turning to new support networks, such as the CAC and 'showing' in exhibitions that privileged medium.

The late 1970s and early 1980s provided opportunities to separate pottery as an art form from the application of ceramic materials and techniques within other artistic frameworks. However, they could not prevent the use of the vessel as motif, material and subject within other areas of artistic practice. Furthermore, in their efforts to distinguish pots that were intended to function as art from those with utilitarian purpose, potters have begun to work as installation artists, sculptors and curators. Consequently, they have made multimedial art about pots, rather than elevating the art status of the vessel.

This chapter also demonstrated how some ceramic objects can have greater resonance when shown within the domestic environment, whether intended for use and ornament, inserted into thought-provoking new narratives, or made as part of a site-specific response to a particular place. *The Uncanny Room*, like Perry's *The Charms of Lincolnshire*, demonstrated that embracing the polyvocality of pre-existing ceramic objects could highlight their capacity to make statements that extend beyond their own status. *Unravelling the Manor House* showed that the language of ceramic objects, rather than their

517 Glenn Adamson, "Making a Mess. Ceramic Sculpture Now," The Schein-Joseph International Museum of Ceramic Art, 2008, accessed October 2, 2013, http://ceramicsmuseum.alfred.edu/perkins_lect_series.

production, could also be the core of an artist's practice, for conceptual reasons. By contrast to De Waal's *Signs & Wonders*, these projects were grounded in the devolution of authorship from artist to reader. Providing prompts for meaning making, they raised questions, but left the visitors to draw their own conclusions.

This move towards alternative display sites might be seen to further indicate that if expository contexts can limit readings of a work, they can also encourage alternative ones. However, when read in tandem with Kwon's model of site-specificity, it is apparent that authorship can be returned to the artist if a work is viewed as one of a series within the artist's *vitae*: it becomes, for example 'a Clare Twomey.' This can return it to the discourse around ceramic practice, rather than the discursive site it generated. Nevertheless, as such works are often located outside 'ceramics' departments (for example, *Trophy* was in the V&A's cast courts, Smith's *Bulldog* in a historic house) they are also part of wider histories of the artist–museum relationship and might be read accordingly. Purposely relational, rather than didactic, encountering works without this background, visitors might further re-frame them within their own exposition histories, shifting the focus back to their discursive role.

Chapter FIVE: Material and Process

For many ceramic practitioners direct physical engagement with clay forms the core of a symbiotic physical and conceptual making process. Sensory engagement with material and process can also inform understandings of their works. However, modern museums linked learning and appreciation to observation. As a result, opportunities for engagement with ceramic works were largely restricted to the realm of the visual. As Tony Bennett has advanced:

If, for the past two hundred years and more, the curator's role has been to arrange an authoritative message for the museum's public, this has been done by exhibiting collections in a manner calculated to render that message visible.⁵¹⁸

Seeking to remedy this situation, museums have sought to create opportunities for multisensory engagement with collection objects, balancing access with their mission to preserve those objects for future generations. In the past forty years, acts of “showing making,” have also received greater attention within museum programmes, whether as part of their interpretative arsenals, foregrounded within - or even as - the works themselves.

These developments have challenged the dearth of occasions for material engagement within the museum. They have also provided means of unseating preconceptions about form, permanence and authorship in ceramic practice, as well as questioning the division between works produced by ceramic practitioners and other artists. However, they pose questions about the value of craft practice. If the meaning is in the making then why exhibit the object? Do we, once

⁵¹⁸ Tony Bennett, “Pedagogic Objects, Clean Eyes and Popular Instruction: On Sensory Regimes and Museum Didactics,” *Configurations* 6, no. 3 (1998): 345.

more, end up with ceramic objects about ceramic practice? These are issues this chapter seeks to address.

1. Touch

In his seminal book *Ceramics*, Rawson proposed that tactility and the sense of touch were invaluable parts of the making and appreciation of many types of ceramics as well as sculpture and other 'plastic arts': something he complained was poorly served by both the visual focus of Western culture and the prohibition of touch within the museum environment.⁵¹⁹ Constance Classen's research into the history of the senses has since demonstrated that handling played an important role in early museums and that touch was only withdrawn in the late nineteenth century as visual approaches to science and aesthetics ascended and the conservation of collections became a priority.⁵²⁰ These shifts notwithstanding, as discussed in chapter three, contemporary ceramic objects occupied a more ambiguous position at the time Rawson's book was written and were often allocated to touring or educational collections, permitting a greater degree of supervised tactile access.

The fact that major museums such as the V&A and National Museum Wales allowed contemporary ceramics to be transported and handled as part of circulating collections may have indicated that they were considered less worthy of preservation than the objects in the permanent collections.⁵²¹ Peter Floud, the V&A Circulation Department's keeper of ceramics from 1947-1960, contended that value and fragility did not preclude an object's inclusion in touring exhibitions: an assertion supported by the quality of the historic objects

519 Philip Rawson, *Ceramics*, 20. Rawson stated: "And by this I mean not merely generalized texture-sensation, but a fully formulates structure of touch and grasp concepts."

520 Constance Classen, "Museum Manners; The Sensory Life of the Early Museum," *Journal of Social History* 40, no. 1 (2007): 895-914. Until the mid-nineteenth century, visitors were commonly allowed to touch collections objects in British museums, with curators facilitating this engagement.

521 Rollo Charles to James Tower, 9 March, 1961, Exhibitions 1961, National Museum of Wales archive, Cardiff, Wales.

in the collection, which included nationally significant items such as a Thomas Toft slipware dish.⁵²² However, when coupled with Classen's assertion that the elite exercised power over culturally privileged artefacts by limiting the lower classes' tactile access to them, it might suggest they were accorded less cultural capital.⁵²³

This situation changed when contemporary ceramics began to enter museums' permanent collections on a more regular basis during the 1970s and '80s. As curator Stuart Davies observed "[This] strong belief in the necessity to maintain museum collections, in perpetuity, for the benefit of the present public and for future generations [...] formed the keystone of curatorial values and the development of a professional self-image for museum workers," and this conviction still held true in the early 1990s.⁵²⁴ Once contemporary ceramic works were accessioned, therefore, placed a greater onus on their preservation. As a result of this shift, tactile access was restricted to museum staff and supervised visitors.

As Hooper-Greenhill, amongst others, has observed, from the late nineteenth century, when many British museums were established, until the early 1990s, sensory engagement with objects was regarded as the lowest level of understanding.⁵²⁵ Moving the objects into a framework within which observation took priority may, therefore, be seen to accord them a higher intellectual value. However, studio ceramics were largely shown within displays that placed a higher priority on their aesthetic properties than critical engagement with their conceptual import or potential role outside the museum. This suited the direction of potters such as Britton and Fritsch who were attempting to foster engagement on a formal level, yet it limited readings of the

522 Peter Floud, "The Circulation Department of the Victoria & Albert Museum," *Museum* 3, no. 4 (1950): 299.

523 Constance Classen, "Museum Manners; The Sensory Life of the Early Museum," 908.

524 Stuart Davies, "Rethinking Museum Values and Strategies," in *Museum Provision and Professionalism*, 36.

525 Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*, reprint (London: Routledge, 2004), 105.

works of those for whom materiality and use were paramount. Nevertheless, at the V&A, works by many of the same practitioners were also exhibited in the craft shop where they might be handled, creating a productive conflict between the retail and collections displays.

Established in August 1974, the craft shop at the V&A was designed by Barry Mazur, who had created the Crafts Advisory Committee's inaugural exhibition *The Craftsman's Art* at the museum a year previously.⁵²⁶ It was the brainchild of museum director Roy Strong, who was keen to support contemporary craftspeople and who argued that the objects in the shop would be the exhibits of tomorrow.⁵²⁷ Yet, as the museum began to acquire more contemporary craft works in the same period, the temporal gap that once distinguished the exhibits in the museum from those in the shop had vanished. Whilst Stephen Greenblatt has argued that "modern museums in effect at once evoke the dream of possession and evacuate it" through the use of boutique lighting and retail display techniques, in the Crafts shop at the V&A the desire for ownership generated by the displays was not quashed, but could be realized.⁵²⁸ Indeed, from 1979 the shop began to host showcase exhibitions and in the first five years alone it provided solo shows for Fritsch, Joanna Constantinidis, Michael Casson, Baldwin, Poncelet, Jill Crowley, Slee, Carol McNicoll, Sarah Radstone, Lowndes, Angus Suttie and a collaboration between Janice Tchalenko and John Hinchliffe, as well as numerous famous names working in other craft media, from David Pye to Susanna Heron.⁵²⁹

The majority of these ceramists made works that had an ambiguous relationship to function. Consequently, at a seminar 'The Artist Craftsman and Museums Today,' in 1977, CAC Chairman Margrie and Francis Cheetham

526 The design of this exhibition is discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

527 Roy Strong, "Craft Shop at the V&A," *Ceramic Review*, no. 19 (1974): 16.

528 Stephen Greenblatt, "Resonance and Wonder," in *Exhibiting Cultures. The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, eds. Ivan Karp and Stephen D. Levine (Washington DC; London: The Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 49.

529 Crafts Council and Victoria and Albert Museum, *Twenty-five Years: Crafts Council Shop at the V&A* (London: Crafts Council, 1999), 59.

(Director of Norfolk Museum Service and a member of the CAC Purchasing Committee) were asked if the products of the artist craftsman should be used. In response, they suggested that, whilst museum objects could not be, the fact that people could purchase objects through crafts shops might resolve the 'untouchable,' issue that museums faced.⁵³⁰ Rather than highlighting the inalienable nature of the museum collections, this demonstrated the hierarchical nature of tactile access: whilst those that felt confident enough to touch the objects in the shop could do so, only those that could afford to purchase them were able to do so freely. However, it also demonstrated that, even if the ceramists intended their works to be self-referential, in the homes of collectors, as much as museums, they could be inserted into alternative systems of meaning.

Whilst modern museums and galleries employed ocularcentric interpretative approaches that marginalized the other senses, as detailed in chapter two, by the 1980s publicly funded museums in Britain faced pressure to be more inclusive and, thus, demonstrate their value. The resultant drive to improve access led to – amongst other developments – initiatives that targeted those with physical impairments and different learning styles, placing a growing emphasis on sensory access. By 1988 Bennett was compelled to admit:

The dominance of the eye has been put into question for some time now across a range of museum practices - from hands-on exhibits that promote tactile involvement in the museum environment, through museums in which the sonic element predominates over the visual, to avant-garde experiments in which sound and vision are gratingly misaligned with one another.⁵³¹

As these models of practice began to circulate via academic texts and professional literature, museums began to consider how they might balance the potential risk of damage to objects with the immediate benefits of a more

530 Museums Journal, "The Artist Craftsman and Museums Today," *Museums Journal* 77, no 1 (1977): 25-28.

531 Tony Bennett, "Pedagogic Objects, Clean Eyes and Popular Instruction: On Sensory Regimes and Museum Didactics," *Configurations* 6, no. 3 (1998): 346-347.

flexible approach to access: a paradoxical situation that a UK research group labelled 'Conservation's Catch 22', noting that:

- Access to heritage objects brings social benefit.
- Greater access brings greater social benefit.
- Greater access brings greater damage.
- Greater damage brings reduced social benefit.⁵³²

Some of the efforts to provide alternative entry points to museum collections without risking damage were basic supplements to the objects on display, which allowed visitors to gauge the texture of various materials. For example, the technical gallery of the City Museum and Art Gallery in Stoke-on-Trent, which opened in 1982, contained samples of raw materials, which could be handled. This approach had its limitations and, as Fiona Candlin forwarded when discussing a similar scheme employed in sculpture tours at Tate Liverpool:

Although this is in some ways a logical response to a situation not of that curator's creation it doesn't recognise that touch is not just about putting something into your hand, rather it involves the position of your fingers, wrists, arms and body in relation to an object. People do not just feel for "limestone" with their fingertips, but for the work as a whole.⁵³³

The curators in Stoke-on-Trent were alert to this shortcoming and also placed utilitarian wares on open display, permitting visitors to hold them up to the light in order to ascertain whether or not they were porcelain as a connoisseur might. However, whilst these approaches to object handling served to question the visual bias of modern Western culture and to stimulate discussion about alternative modes of interpretation, they were developed in relation to things

532 University College London, "Cultural Encounters and Explorations: Conservation's 'Catch 22,'" University College London, 2009, <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/conservation-c-22/catch22>, accessed November 2, 2014.

533 Fiona Candlin, "Blindness, Art and Exclusion in Museums and Galleries," *The International Journal of Art Design* 22, no. 1 (2003): 100-110. See also Bonnie Kemske, "Evoking Intimacy: Touch and the Thoughtful Body in Sculptural Ceramics" (PhD thesis, Royal College of Art, London, 2007), 29. Undertaking practical investigations into tactile ceramic objects, Kemske concluded "tactility cannot be considered separately from form, scale, textured surfaces, or other surface treatments."

that had once performed a multisensory role in life and had an abstract relationship to the newly made works intended for galleries or the market.

Addressing contemporary works more directly, staff at Gallery Oldham have endeavoured to provide tactile access to their ceramics displays in several ways over the past fifteen years.⁵³⁴ Originally, their efforts were targeted at improving the provision for the blind and partially sighted. For example, the *Art of the Potter* gallery, which houses a rotating exhibition of studio ceramics, was developed in consultation with Henshaw's Society for Blind People.⁵³⁵ As a result, some objects were placed on open display and other works were commissioned specifically for public handling. The museum's suggestion that visitors could 'touch and play' with them, posed a challenge to traditional models of detached observation and appropriate bodily deportment in galleries that house ceramics. However, as Candlin cautioned, unless they address the ways in which people produce meaning through touch – in combination with the other senses – such initiatives serve as lesser adjuncts to seeing and merely reaffirm the dominance of vision.⁵³⁶

To some extent, Gallery Oldham attempted to foster understanding of the specific qualities of touch through handling sessions – an approach that was also developed with Henshaw's. The workshops, which encouraged visitors to consider the non-visual properties of ceramic objects, such as weight, temperature, texture and construction, were gradually rolled out to school groups and then the wider public, with visitor services staff trained to direct tactile engagement in the galleries. This expansion was prompted by curator Dinah Winch's own encounters with ceramic objects: realising that touch

534 Arts Council England, "Harris Action Research Project," *Arts Council England*, accessed March 12, 2014, <http://www.takingpartinthearts.com/content.php?content=390>. The two museums have conducted a great deal of work in this area over the past fifteen years, developing this further as part of a collaborative Heritage Lottery Fund-supported *Collecting Cultures* project. The Harris received funding from Arts Council England in 1998/1999, which enabled them to work with visually impaired visitors with their feedback informing future gallery developments.

535 Gallery Oldham, *Gallery Oldham April – September 2013* (Oldham: Oldham Council, 2013), 2.

536 Fiona Candlin, "The Dubious Inheritance of Touch: Art History and Museum Access," *Journal of Visual Culture* 5, no. 2 (2006): 137-154.

helped her to engage with the collection in different ways, she wanted to extend that opportunity to more visitors. Consequently, the museum began to acquire material specifically for the handling collection. In some cases these purchases linked to works from the collection that were deemed too fragile for open access, including a set of hands that Clare Curneen made so that visitors could touch them without risking damage to the fragile original [fig. 37]. In other instances, they aided understanding of a work's construction: Kate Malone made a biscuit-fired version of her *Baby Lady Garlic Bud Pot* to this end, which included a group of individual buds, which people could feel, gaining a haptic appreciation of the ceramic materials that were usually masked by her trademark glazes.⁵³⁷

Tactile engagement has clear advantages over textual interpretation when attempting to explain materiality. Writers from Walter Benjamin (1936) to Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart (2004) have also described the auratic and affective powers of encountering historical objects that have passed through the hands of others.⁵³⁸ However, as Adamson has observed, in craft discourse the trace of the maker's hand is often seem to imbue new objects with similar powers of evocation, with little consideration of what and how it might communicate.⁵³⁹ Certainly, one might question if or how handling replicas of Curneen's *Daphne* contributed to the appreciation of her work. This is something that Adamson attempted to address in his book *The Invention of Craft*, with reference to social anthropologist Alfred Gell's *The Enchantment of Technology and The Technology of Enchantment* (1992). Focusing on "the user's ability to imaginatively approximate the knowledge of the maker," he argued that the understanding of craft was relational: a purview akin to that of

537 Dinah Winch and Caroline Jordan, "Collecting 20th century ceramics: HLF Collecting Cultures grant," presentation, Craft Curators Day, Design Council, London, October 16, 2008.

538 Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 217-251. Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart, ed. *Photographs, Objects, Histories: On the Materiality of Images* (London and New York, Routledge, 2004). See also Esther Leslie, "Introduction: The Physical Past," in *Material Memories: Design and Evocation*, eds. Marcus Kwint, Christopher Breward, and Jeremy Aynsley (Oxford: Berg, 1999), 1-16.

539 Glenn Adamson, *The Invention of Craft* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 100.

Candlin, who has posited that we understand the world by relating the unknown to things we are familiar with and our multi-layered and embodied experience of them.⁵⁴⁰ Applied to the appreciation of craft skill, as Adamson explained:

For a novice faced with a ceramic bowl, this might mean the extraordinary thinness of an expertly thrown shape; for an initiate, a glaze fired to just the right thickness; for a connoisseur, a subtle and easily overlooked pressure of the fingertip into the clay at the bowl's lip or foot.⁵⁴¹

The introduction of alternative models of sensory appreciation also raised questions about notions of value in the museum. For example, Walter Keeler donated a jug with a firing crack when the museum purchased a similar (undamaged) teapot. This provided a useful starting point for student ceramic practitioners who were invited to explain their making processes in relation to the objects.⁵⁴² However, whilst the damage might be seen to add an extra layer of narrative to a ceramic object acquired for its social history value, such objects are rarely acquired for art collections, except as supplements. Similarly, the extra pieces that Malone and Curneen produced served as interpretative tools and contextual material, rather than art objects. They would not have been acquired without their original counterparts, the preservation of which took precedence over tactile access.

It might reasonably be argued that such enterprises maintained the hierarchical distinction between display value and tactile value: access to the completed works was still limited. In the same vein, supervised handling sessions may also be seen to accord the curator, who governs access to the

540 Fiona Candlin, "Blindness, Art and exclusion in Museums and Galleries," 100-110.

541 Glenn Adamson, *The Invention of Craft*, 101. Wing Yan Vivian Ting, "Dancing Pot and Pregnant Jar? On Ceramic Metaphors and Creative Labels," in *Museum Materialities. Objects, Engagement, Interpretations*, 189-203. This is an approach that educationalist Wing Yan Vivian Ting took one step further when facilitating access to the historic ceramics collections at Bristol Museum, organising sessions where familiar objects provided an in-road to unpick ceramic terms, for example, relating the name and texture of biscuits to bisque-fired ceramics.

542 Dinah Winch and Caroline Jordan, "Collecting 20th century ceramics: HLF Collecting Cultures grant."

objects and directs questioning, a greater mastery of touch. Bourdieu has proposed that, for example, the statements made by “the ward orderly who speaks the language of a doctor,” are regarded as illegitimate, not because the doctor has mastered that language to a greater extent than the ward orderly, but because of the authority invested in the doctor.⁵⁴³ Transposing his analysis of linguistic exchange onto this situation, the touch of the museum professional or connoisseur, is regarded as an essential means of appraising and understanding a work, and that of the public, as potentially damaging, not because one group has more refined sense of touch, but because of the hierarchical social distinction between them.⁵⁴⁴

David Cushway attempted to challenge this notion of legitimacy in *Teatime at the Museum* (2012) – a film in which he and curator Andrew Renton drank from a tea set in the National Museum of Wales’s collection.⁵⁴⁵ The recording begins with Renton removing the tea set from a vitrine within the ceramics gallery. Focusing on his nitrile gloves, which are worn to protect delicate objects (particularly gilded ceramics) from the damage posed by the oils on their hands, it frames the approach to ceramics that Cushway wished to challenge. When Cushway probes him about how he feels about being asked to use it, Renton admits to feeling “a bit naughty,” as he transgressed curatorial rules. However, whilst Cushway suggests artists can subvert the museum structure or power, in fact, the museum’s conservators assessed the suitability of the tea set for use before the video was made. Tellingly, Renton, instead, describes artists as enablers, who can give curators permission to try things that might seem cavalier were they to do them on their own initiative. The fact that he didn’t may suggest that hands-off approaches to objects are so embedded in notions of professional duty that he simply hadn’t considered asking.

543 Pierre Bourdieu, “The Economic of Linguistic Exchanges,” *Social Science Information*, no. 16 (1977): 645-668.

544 Fiona Candlin, “Museums, Modernity and the class politics of touching objects,” in *Touch in Museums: Policy and Practice in Object Handling*, ed. Helen Chatterjee (Oxford: Berg, 2008), 19.

545 David Cushway, *Teatime at the Museum*, David Cushway, accessed September 4, 2015, http://www.davidcushway.co.uk/2012/Teatime_at_the_Museum.html.

In many ways, *Teatime at the Museum* simply extended curatorial legitimacy to another authority figure – the artist – without truly challenging working methods. In this respect, Gallery Oldham's endeavours, which, similarly, represented a compromise between access and preservation, were more radical. The curators, who were accustomed to prioritising the visual and linguistic, had to defer to the staff from Henshaw's in order to learn how to deliver handling sessions that were truly touch-centred. This was a move that challenged existing understandings about the ownership of expertise in museums. Nevertheless, although these opportunities for tactile engagement with ceramic objects served as means of interpretation, which helped staff and visitors to develop an understanding of material and process, it was unclear if, or how, these exercises related to the content of the works.

Taking a more holistic approach to multisensory engagement, some practitioners have attempted to initiate it with and through their work. For example, in 2002 Felicity Aylieff produced the touring exhibition *Sense and Perception* in collaboration with Manchester Art Gallery. The culmination of her research into the technical means of making large ceramic works, the exhibition showcased her human-scaled abstract sculptures [fig. 38]. Visitors were invited to feel the works' textures and temperatures or hear the sounds created when they slapped them, and which hinted at the void inside. These were not the typical objects found in ceramics displays and did not represent a departure from displays in traditional museum and gallery displays. Instead, like Morris's *Bodyspacemotionthings* (1971), which was discussed in the previous chapter, they raised awareness of the body's phenomenological presence in space. Yet whilst Morris encouraged engagement with the natural properties of the materials, here, those properties were attained through Aylieff's in-depth technical knowledge.

The highly finished works in *Sense and Perception* formed a stark contrast to the use of clay evidenced in another exhibition, which was held at the Saatchi Gallery the year before and which heralded the return to material engagement

in fine art practice. Curator Patricia Ellis declared: “*New Labour* demonstrates that the production of art is a democratic activity: anyone can learn these crafts. What makes these artists special is their painstaking process and perfected techniques.”⁵⁴⁶ However, within the exhibition obvious ‘handicraft’ was framed as a reaction against the dominance of the perfectly fabricated, the conceptual and the high-tech in art and daily life: works produced with materials and techniques that were available to all. *New Labour* included Rebecca Warren’s visceral, figurative sculptures, in which the exaggerated gestural marks left by her hands serve as markers of her first hand engagement with materials. For example, her *Croccioni* (2000) featured a pair of exaggerated comic book style legs, tottering on a clumpy high-heeled shoe, striding across two low plinths. Made from unfired clay, dust from the work spread through the gallery and the overall impression was messy. It was all about process, but not about mastery. This was a craft revival, but it was not a revival of “the crafts.”

In the catalogue that accompanied *Sense and Perception*, Helen Bevis described the exhibition offered a means of appreciating Aylieff’s “sculptural mastery of material and form” and fellow essayist, sculptor Emma Maiden, focused on Aylieff’s “on-going personal enquiry into material and form.”⁵⁴⁷ Thus framed, the sculptures became ciphers of her skill, rather than prompts for the visitors’ own investigations. Furthermore, whilst she Bevis described the merits of haptic access, written vocabulary proved a less adequate means of discussing the aesthetic qualities of the works. Museum director Virginia Tandy praised Aylieff for making the sculptures “touch friendly,” yet the quality of that touch and its relationship to the “form, mass and surface treatment,” which she lauded was unclear.⁵⁴⁸ This might be seen to indicate that recent investigations into the benefits of haptic engagement with objects that were

⁵⁴⁶ Patricia Ellis, *New Labour* (London: Saatchi Gallery, 2001), n.p.

⁵⁴⁷ Helen Bevis, “Perceptive Touch,” in *Sense and Perception. Felicity Aylieff*, ed. Manchester City Galleries (Manchester: Manchester City Galleries, 2002), 7-11; Emma Maiden, “Felicity Aylieff,” in *Sense and Perception. Felicity Aylieff*, 1.

⁵⁴⁸ Virginia Tandy, “Foreword,” in *Sense and Perception, Felicity Aylieff*, n.p.

designed for use had been transposed onto Aylieff's practice without regard for their relevance to their function as art.

For those engaged in the discourse around craft, Aylieff's work might be read as a meditation on the merits of mastering one's materials.⁵⁴⁹ In his essay *When Craft Gets Sloppy* (2008) Adamson acknowledged that works that privilege the perfection that is attainable through the cultivation of craft skill often efface the traces of human fallibility that valorises craft in the first place. However, he argued that the lack of refinement in "sloppy craft" works, such as those in *New Labour*, was often a consequence of post-disciplinary education, within which students did not have sufficient opportunities to develop craft skill, rather than a wilful disregard for finish. In contrast to the polished works that such artists had turned against (for example, the works of Carsten Höller and Koons), which were produced through costly outsourcing, Aylieff invited visitors to explore how skilled making can broaden one's vocabulary. Nonetheless, as Claudia Gould has noted, as well as being a revolt against the high production values of post-studio art, the return to the studio might be viewed as a means of taking back the job of making.⁵⁵⁰ This issue was addressed through relational works; to which we will turn shortly and which made the model of object-centred engagement forwarded by Aylieff appear distinctly regressive.

2. Craft and facture

Although haptic approaches to the appreciation of ceramic objects can help people to gain an embodied understanding of the relationship between form, materiality, meaning and how a work is assembled, their capacity to communicate the processual aspects of making, on which structures of value, authorship and meaning within craft centred practice pivot, is limited.

549 Glenn Adamson, "When Craft Gets Sloppy," *Crafts*, no. 211 (2008): 36-41.

550 Claudia Gould, "Foreword," in *Dirt on Delight: Impulses that Form Clay*, eds. Glenn Adamson, Claudia Gould, Jenelle Porter and Ingrid Schaffner (Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania), 9.

However the development of artefact studies in disciplines ranging from archaeology to material culture, has led to the realisation that:

If the analysis of things ignores processes of production, it fails to acknowledge how the complex interaction between humans, materials, tools and technologies shapes the possible meanings and usages of the resulting artefact.⁵⁵¹

Responding to this challenge, museums have frequently employed ceramic practitioners to deliver making workshops and demonstrations in order to remedy this lack – to demonstrate their own processes, to illuminate those used to create other works within museum collections and to teach visitors how to work with clay.

In *A Potter's Book* Bernard Leach attempted to differentiate the artistic fusion of hand and brain, typified by Herbert Read's "intuitive and humanistic" craftsman, from the "rational, abstract and tectonic" approach of the designer working towards mass production.⁵⁵² This purview, which exerted great influence over the post-war development of British studio pottery, was grounded in the notion that hand making was a morally superior counterpoint to industrial ceramics. The objects produced according to this standard, which fused lifestyle, production techniques and aesthetics, were contextualised through the studio-cum-gallery and images of makers in their studio promulgated by craft and ceramics-focused publications.⁵⁵³ This model endured in the face of shifts avant-garde fine art practice, where Daniel Buren's 1971 description of the studio as the unique space of production for works that were then transferred to the unique space of exposition - the museum - was already becoming outdated by the time he wrote it.⁵⁵⁴ By contrast, his

551 Ann-Sophie Lehmann, "Showing Making: On Visual Documentation and Creative Practice," *Journal of Modern Craft* 5, no. 1 (2012): 10.

552 Bernard Leach, *A Potter's Book*, 2.

553 Edmund De Waal, "Cultured Living" *Ceramic Review*, no. 212 (2005): 41-43.

554 Daniel Buren, "The Function of the Studio," in *Institutional Critique. An Anthology of Artists' Writings*, eds. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge; Mass and London: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2009), 110. Original published 1971.

characterisation of the studio as “a stationary place where portable objects are produced,” still reflected its role in ceramic practice.⁵⁵⁵ For Buren objects produced in this environment were open to “infinite manipulation” when they were decontextualized and entered the museum: an issue that became more pertinent for ceramic practitioners when these institutions began to collect their works on a more sustained basis during the 1970s.

The momentum that brought contemporary ceramics into museums in this period – generated by the craft revival and the establishment of the Crafts Advisory Committee – also impelled institutions such as Norwich Castle Museum, Hove Museum of Art, The Shipley Art Gallery and the V&A to invite ceramists to demonstrate their making processes in museum spaces.⁵⁵⁶ These initiatives were launched at a time when museums were unclear about their role with regard to contemporary craft: was it to promote craft objects and encourage the public to purchase them or to acquire those objects themselves?⁵⁵⁷

One attempt to navigate this new territory was *The Makers* - a five-day programme of events in 1975, which saw a group of craftspeople that included ceramic practitioners Mo Jupp and Walter Keeler demonstrating their processes in the V&A's galleries. It was a venture that built upon the premise of Edward Lucie-Smith's book *The World of the Makers: Today's Master Craftsmen and Craftswomen*, which aimed to weave the biographical and aesthetic together, using photographs of and interviews with craftspeople in their homes and workplaces.⁵⁵⁸ However, whilst V&A Director Roy Strong declared “eleven artist craftsmen of today [had] moved their workshops in lock, stock and barrel

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid., 110.

⁵⁵⁶ There are records of throwing demonstrations at Hanley Museum, Stoke-on-Trent dating back to the early twentieth century. However, this may reflect the museum's location at the heart of the UK ceramics industry. There, most people had a thorough understanding of ceramic processes, affording them a more informed viewpoint. See The Potteries Museum and Art Gallery archive of press cuttings.

⁵⁵⁷ Museums Journal, “The Artist Craftsman and Museums Today,” *Museums Journal* 77, no. 1 (1977): 25-28.

⁵⁵⁸ Edward Lucie-Smith, *World of the Makers. Today's Master Craftsmen and Craftswomen* (New York; London; Toronto: Paddington Press Ltd., 1975), 8. Lucie-Smith expounded: ‘What is lacking is a book which speaks of the craftsman as a hero, as Vasari in his *Lives* spoke of the painters and sculptors who made the Renaissance.’

and settled down to work for a week in our galleries,” just one aspect of that world – the physical making process – was transferred from the studio to the museum.⁵⁵⁹ The context of the latter objectified that skill: an approach that had a forerunner in nineteenth and early twentieth-century ethnographic expositions, where people were asked to ‘perform themselves.’⁵⁶⁰ They were not just staged as the makers of their own work but also, located alongside historic museum collections; they stood in for the essentialist figure of the maker.

Adamson has suggested that the live demonstration, which he described as “the most effective rhetorical tool of craft revival,” could only function when people had become detached from the day-to-day experience of craft production.⁵⁶¹ In this situation, hand making might be regarded as a remote object, which merited interpretation. The performative appearance of wheel throwing, in particular, served as a motif of tradition for twentieth-century studio potters, albeit a romanticised and composite one that was central to ‘the invention of craft.’⁵⁶² For example, in 1953, the BBC produced an interlude – a short film to fill the gaps between programmes – that centred on the actions of a potter’s hands as he shaped clay.⁵⁶³ One of a number of such interludes, which presented romanticised images of British landscapes and traditions, it was characteristic of the nationalistic approach to pottery perpetuated through the initiatives such as the *Modern British Crafts* exhibition. The same motif was also repeated in the opening credits of the two-part BBC series *The Craft of the Potter*, which was aired in 1976.⁵⁶⁴

559 Dr Roy Strong, Draft article for Times Educational Supplement, March 1976, The Makers: Artist Craftsmen at Work, 29 Dec – 3 Jan 1975, Box MA29 [Press office file], folder 219, Victoria and Albert Museum archive, London, UK.

560 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “Objects of Ethnography,” in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. Ivan Karp (Washington: Smithsonian, 1991), 388.

561 Glenn Adamson, “Craft and the Romance of the Studio,” *American Art* 21, no. 1 (2007): 14.

562 Glenn Adamson “The Invention of Craft.” See also Moira Vincentelli, “Tradition and Traditions. The International Ceramics Festival, Abersytwyth, 2007,” *Ceramics Technical*, no. 26 (2008), 78-82.

563 BBC, “Potter’s Wheel Interlude 16 February 1953,” accessed July 18, 2015, *History of the BBC* <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0276jjh>.

564 BBC, “The Craft of the Potter – Glaze and Fire (Part I),” YouTube video, 10:54, posted by “Richard Hildebrand,” October 30, 2009 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8jwR8AunMIE>

The Makers' activities were, therefore, at risk of being read as representations of the past, collapsing the distinction between historical and contemporary contexts. In the case of Keeler, whose practice was grounded in historical forms and techniques, the narrative of continuity might override questions about his ideological or stylistic motivation as a practitioner working in the 1970s. Conversely, Jupp, demonstrating his art-oriented hand building process and 'sculptural ceramics' addressed current concerns more overtly: his helmet forms bore little resemblance to the objects in the ceramics displays, yet the museum's gesture of showing united it with pottery on the basis of process.

Whilst designated craft centres such as Cleveland and Ruthin and international initiatives including the European Keramik Work Centre (EKWC) provided extended residencies for ceramic practitioners, which married financial and technical support with the more general mission to raise public awareness of ceramic practice, those initiatives attached to museum programmes retained a closer link to education and interpretation. Often, museum demonstrations were concentrated on just two aspects of practice - the manual production of unfired clay objects and decoration. Partly attributable to the lack of kiln facilities in museums and galleries, this obscured the scientific aspect of much ceramic production as well as the unpredictable nature of firing. For example, when Derek Emms, "famed for his 'high temperature reduction firings' and the colour variations the technique produces," was invited to Stoke-on-Trent City Museum and Art Gallery in 1990 he demonstrated the more readily reproduced skills of throwing, turning and hand painting.⁵⁶⁵ As a result, it offered little insight into either the chain of decisions and trial and error that constituted his making processes or those that had produced the other ceramic objects on display in the museum.

These initiatives assumed the format of technical instruction: demonstrations had been an established part of ceramics and craft-focused events for some fifty years before *The Makers* was launched, providing

565 "Derek Knows How to Mould an Audience's Interest," *Sentinel (Stoke)*, 28 August, 1990, n.p.

opportunities to showcase the manual and technical skills that were seen to define good craftsmanship. They also formed – and continue to form - the core of craft-centred education. Despite this, their purpose was less clear when transferred to the museum and detached from the haptic and accumulated understanding that made the results of applied skill legible. How can watching a demonstration help museum visitors to understand the role that craft plays within a work? Does watching the production of a contemporary work aid understanding of wider ceramic process and other ceramic artefacts? Where is the line between the two?

The dominant textual modes of interpretation privileged in museums have a limited ability to communicate corporeal processes. By contrast, the authors of the 2008 study *Teaching and Learning Through Practice*, which was led by The University of Brighton in conjunction with The Royal College of Art, The V&A Museum and the Royal Institute of British Architects, concluded that the use of gesture and other non-verbal forms of communication aid understanding of production process.⁵⁶⁶ Recent neurological research has further confirmed the relational value of haptic experience, as discussed previously with reference to Adamson and Candlin, revealing that the neurons activated by our own experiences of performing motor actions are also fired when we observe others performing related actions.⁵⁶⁷ Lehmann has credited the appeal of demonstrations to this factor, arguing that it allows people to share in the making experience, without necessarily aiming to replicate it.⁵⁶⁸

Questions about the interpretative role of the practitioner are more complicated. In some cases, contemporary making processes have played an explicit role in deciphering those of historic collections. This was exemplified by

566 Alma Boyes and Cynthia Cousens, "Sustaining Craft Practice by Teaching and Learning through Live Demonstration" *Making Futures* 1 (2009), accessed July 11, 2013, <http://makingfutures.plymouthart.ac.uk/>.

567 Ann-Sophie Lehmann, "Showing Making: On Visual Documentation and Creative Practice"; Beatriz Calbo Merino et al, "Seeing or Doing? Influence of Visual and Motor Familiarity in Action Observation [Report]," *Current Biology*, no. 6, (2006): 1905–1910.

568 Ann-Sophie Lehmann, "Showing Making: On Visual Documentation and Creative Practice," 14.

Michelle Erickson's 2012 V&A residency, during which she conducted research into how objects from the collections were made, creating three videos on the subject and producing new objects that utilised her discoveries.⁵⁶⁹ Such examples notwithstanding, though, the practitioner's work and the educational mission of the museum are rarely so closely aligned. Furthermore, whilst foregrounding process may render craft values more apprehensible, in mirroring the presentation of technical instruction it focuses on how things are made, perpetuating the hierarchical schism between making and thinking that has prevailed in Western society since the industrial revolution.⁵⁷⁰

Challenging the dominance of the text and image-based 'how to,' "thinking through making," has become the veritable leitmotif of contemporary craft theory."⁵⁷¹ Building on Michael Polanyi's notion of tacit knowledge and applying it to craft practice, anthropologist Tim Ingold has argued that:

In the art of inquiry, the conduct of thought goes along with, and continually answers to, the fluxes and flows of the materials with which we work. These materials think in us as we think in them. Here, every work is an experiment: not in the natural scientific sense of testing a preconceived hypothesis, or of engineering a confrontation between ideas 'in the head' and facts 'on the ground,' but in the sense of prising an opening and following where it leads.⁵⁷²

The provision of workshops within the museum can allow visitors to experience the embodied nature of learning through doing. Bringing material and contextual practices into collision, they highlight how the mind and body work in tandem when they engage with materials, how the properties of those materials also shape that engagement, and the situated and inexpressible nature

569 The titles of two of Erickson's videos included the words 'How was it made?': *How Was it Made? An Agate Teapot by Michelle Erickson* and *How was it Made? A Puzzle Jug by Michelle Erickson*. V&A Museum, "Ceramics Resident Michelle Erickson," V&A Museum, accessed March 7, 2015, <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/c/michelle-erickson>.

570 Zoe Gray, ed. *Making is Thinking* (Rotterdam: Witte de With, 2011).

571 Peter Dormer, *The Art of the Maker: Skill and its Meaning in Art, Craft and Design* (London and Oxford: Thames and Hudson, 1994); Glenn Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft*; Crafts Council, *Learning Through Making: A national enquiry into the value of creative practical education in Britain*.

572 Tim Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*, 6.

of all making processes, whether materials-centred or not. However, ceramic practitioners – and other materials-focused practitioners – are often asked to lead such workshops in conjunction with exhibitions of their work in order to enhance the museum’s educational offering. This process privileges the end product – craft as a means to make things, rather than “an art of enquiry,” in itself. Recent examples range from the children’s ‘surrealist’ clay workshops Neil Brownsword ran at the Gladstone Pottery Museum to accompany his 1997 exhibition at partner institution Stoke-on-Trent City Museum and Art Gallery, to the two-day ‘all abilities’ workshop on throwing porcelain that De Waal led as part of the *Ceramic Rooms* exhibition at the Geffrye Museum (2002-3). De Waal’s workshop was marketed as “a rare opportunity to learn from a master of his craft,” perpetuating the image of the master craftsman – somebody who invests his time in the development of skill, which might be passed on to apprentices.

Such sessions, drawing on the notion of individual mastery for marketing purposes and transferrable skill for content, place practitioners in an ambiguous position: they are elevated above the anonymous educators who lead the day-to-day workshops in the museum, yet it could be argued that their status as artists, whose skills are said to be innate, not learned is eroded.⁵⁷³ However, as the distinctions between contemporary artist, curator and educator, have become increasingly fluid, workshops and open days have become key nodes within relationally oriented projects. Framing these professionals as facilitators, rather than experts, this shift has opened up opportunities for more exploratory craft practice and broader notions of making.

Camden Arts Centre has offered the perfect platform for such approaches. For example, during her 2014 residency at Camden Arts Centre,

573 Geffrye Museum, Workshop: Totally Thrown press release, Geffrye Museum, London, September 24, 2002. “A rare opportunity to learn from a master of his craft, Edmund de Waal, who will lead a two day workshop on understanding and throwing porcelain. Suitable for all abilities.”

Caroline Achaintre conducted practical investigations between the dialogue between object and display, working in both the studio and the gallery space. An artist who works in a range of media, including fired clay, she capitalised on the fact that the residency gave her access to a kiln to focus on her ceramic work. Producing folded clay masks and flattened stoneware forms, which she likened to drawings, she also made display furniture – zig-zag shaped “habitats” on which she choreographed her works to highlight their performative capacity [fig. 39].⁵⁷⁴ However, she also taught pottery classes in which children could “produce a variety of works which explore techniques used by Caroline in her own practice including embossing, weaving and the use of paper clay.”⁵⁷⁵

The same year, Phoebe Cummings undertook a nine-month ‘ceramics fellowship,’ at the same institution. Launched in collaboration with Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts, London, Slade School of Fine Art and the University of Westminster, the fellowship was founded with the aim of offering a space for those who wished to work with clay, in the face of the closure of ceramics courses discussed in chapter two. However, the discursive, research-centred model that it adopted, which also included seminars and symposia, is characteristic of what has been described as the pedagogic, or educational turn,” in contemporary art.⁵⁷⁶ The language of conversation, discursiveness, responsiveness and change – of process, rather than end product has parallels with the notion of thinking through making and, therefore, offered an opportunity to consider the emphasis on producing a ‘response to’ in other residencies.

574 Camden Arts Centre, “Caroline Achaintre and Isobel Harbison in conversation,” Camden Arts Centre, May 14, 2014, accessed May 20, 2015, <http://www.camdenartscentre.org/whats-on/view/eve-dl-10>.

575 Camden Arts Centre, “Ceramics for Juniors,” Camden Arts Centre, accessed July 3, 2014, <http://www.camdenartscentre.org/whats-on/view/edu-615>.

576 Irit Rogoff, “Turning,” *e-flux* (November, 2008), accessed March 3, 2014, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/turning>.

Cummings worked in the closed studio, the gallery, the garden and even undertook a residency in Hawaii during her term there. She was involved with the education programme, collaborated with sculpture students at the Slade School of Fine Art and other artists. In addition to this, she engaged in discussions about and experiments with the properties of different materials with scientist Dr Bryson Gore.⁵⁷⁷ Invited to use the studio and gallery as a research laboratory, Cummings – a trained ceramist who has undertaken a number of residencies in which she has produced clay responses to historic objects and sites, including the V&A and the British Ceramics Biennial's Spode Factory – was able to focus on the art of inquiry, rather than the end product.

Working within the same framework, Theaster Gates arranged for a pottery studio to be installed in London Whitechapel Gallery's white cube space in 2013. Three trained potters and their apprentices occupied it, making pots and bricks to the absent Gates's orders. Assuming the position of project manager, Gates capitalised on the white cube gallery's power to defamiliarise the ordinary, encouraging people to look at labour afresh. He did so in order to forge what he called a 'temporary economy' where the public might consider how qualities normally associated with the arts such as enjoyment, relaxation or contemplation might help to improve working life. Hiring a poet who sang and gave readings in the workspace, as well as massaging the shoulders of the potters and their apprentices, he also aimed to encourage visitors to think about the individual behind the anonymous object, as well as equipping the apprentices with skills that they might apply to other ends in the future or pass on to others.⁵⁷⁸

Discussing the exhibition *The Spirit of Utopia*, which this iteration of Gates's *Soul Manufacturing Corporation* was part of, Whitechapel Director Iwona

577 Camden Arts Centre, "Café Curio Symposium: Creative Materiality – Approaches to Working with Clay," Camden Arts Centre, accessed July 3, 2015, <http://www.camdenartscentre.org/whats-on/view/eve-ik-08>.

578 Miami Design District, "Theaster Gates's Soul Manufacturing Corporation," Vimeo video, 3:05, December 10, 2012, <http://vimeo.com/55327908>

Blazwick referenced Ernst Bloch's 'Principle of Hope' (1954-59) a three-volume missive that explored the ideal future.⁵⁷⁹ Within this framework, the exchange of skill became something spiritually rewarding, rather than a how-to lesson or an opportunity to flaunt skill. It allowed people to imagine an alternative way of working. Looking forward to investigate, rather than backwards to analyse, this too had affinities with Ingold's approach. Indeed, Ingold drew inspiration from Hirokazu Miyazaki's 'method of hope,' (2004), which was, in turn, inspired by Bloch.⁵⁸⁰

3. Beyond studio production

Namita Gupta Wiggers has argued that in public craft demonstrations "the performance is a vehicle through which the potter provides an illusion in which audiences perceive that they have witnessed the making of an object like the finished objects in the booth."⁵⁸¹ However, by inserting making processes that diverge from that model into the same frame, works like those of Gates can fracture the link between artist and object production, undermining the normative function of such displays. Gates's expertise was not spectacularised and interpretative, but was used to direct the actions of other 'performers' – whether visitors or hired workers. Similarly, learning was integral to the temporally unfolding work, rather than a supplementary activity attached to an object. Consequently, the acquisition and application of skill was revealed to be processual and personal, rather than transmitted from expert to recipient: something that moved beyond mechanical replication.

579 Whitechapel Gallery, "Discussion: The Spirit of Utopia," Whitechapel Gallery, August 6, 2013, accessed May 2, 2014, <http://thespiritofutopia.org/Discussion.pdf>. Gate's *Soul Manufacturing Corporation* was also exhibited at Locust Projects, Miami (2012) and Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia (2013). Theaster Gates, "Soul Manufacturing Corporation" Theaster Gates, accessed August 6, 2015, http://theastergates.com/section/339239_Soul_Manufacturing_Corporation.html.

580 Tim Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*, 6.

581 Namita Gupta Wiggers, "Craft Performs," in *Hand + Made: The Performative Impulse in Art and Craft*. ed. Valerie Cassel Oliver (Houston: Contemporary Art Museum, 2010), 28.

In *Soul Manufacturing Corporation*, as the gallery's interpretation panels stressed: "Clay is the material that enables this process to unfold." Adopting a similar approach to the material, Keith Harrison, has re-framed the idea of ceramic performance, by drawing on the resources that museums provide in order to conduct his "art of inquiry."⁵⁸² When he was awarded a residency at the V&A in 2013, Harrison used the opportunity "to galvanise niche audiences, which might include grindcore fans of trade union affiliates or even bowls clubs members."⁵⁸³ This placed a new slant on the more all-inclusive notion of audience development within the V&A, although as Harrison has noted, fans of the Napalm Death – the band that became his main focus – were predominantly middle age, male and a target demographic for the V&A.⁵⁸⁴ To do so, he conducted a number of what he called "interruptions," in the museum. However, the most challenging was a project called *Bustleholme*.

For *Bustleholme*, Harrison drew inspiration from the blue and yellow Della Robbia ceramics in the museum's collection, which reminded him of the tiled tower blocks of Bustleholme Mill estate in West Bromwich where he grew up. Fusing a pre-existing interest in modernist architecture with his interest in the effects that sound has on clay, he built a tower block of his own – a wooden sound system with ten tiled speakers filled with solidified liquid clay. He then invited Napalm Death to play through the system, in order to explore the destructive effects of sound on the clay.

Initially scheduled to take place in the Europe galleries of the V&A in March 2013, *Bustleholme* was cancelled due to fears that the sound would also damage the historic fabric of the building and was later performed at the De La

⁵⁸² Tim Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*, 6.

⁵⁸³ Matilda Pye, "Keith Harrison Interviewed by Matilda Pye," in *Artists Work in Museums: Histories, Interventions, Subjectivities*, ed. Matilda Pye and Linda Sandino (Bath: Wunderkammer Press and the V&A, 2013), 188.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid., 196.

Warr Pavilion, Bexleyheath [fig. 40].⁵⁸⁵ Effectively failing as a spectacle at the V&A, the project might be seen to challenge the museum's capacity to accommodate contemporary practice as well as unseating the stereotype of the ceramics artist-in-residence. However, establishing a community based on musical interest, through a ceramics residency, which supported an artist whose live experiments had frequently failed in the past, it aligned the V&A with contemporary discussions about the distributed museum.⁵⁸⁶ Recognising their "networked, relational, hybrid and performative dimensions," this reconsideration of museums conforms to the wider shift towards relational understandings of space and identity outlined so far.⁵⁸⁷ Like them, it also challenged the use of disciplinary divisions.

Framing divergent forms of making, the V&A's ceramics residency space (opened in 2009) brought questions about craft and authorship in ceramic practice to the fore. Whilst demonstrations provide snatches of process - something Gupta Wiggers has argued gives visitors the false impression that they are observing the studio - at the V&A studio provision dovetails with exposition.⁵⁸⁸ The residents are installed behind glass in the *Making Ceramics* gallery – a room filled with discrete objects that illustrate the result of ceramic production processes and replete with texts and models that focus on how 'the potter' has made and decorated objects, as well as 'clay' 'forming' and 'finishing'.

In the residencies of Erickson and others, such as Louisa Taylor, the connection between the methods of manufacture used to produce the historic objects and those visible in the residency space was explicit. However, for Twomey the collections objects were a starting point through which to address

585 "Bustleholme: Keith Harrison and Napalm Death at the V&A," V&A Museum, 2013, accessed December 20, 2013, <http://www.vam.ac.uk/whatson/event/2399/bustleholme-keith-harrison-napalm-death-at-the-va-3686>.

586 Andrew Dewdney, David Dibosa and Victoria Walsh, *Post-Critical Museology. Theory and Practice in the Art Museum* (Oxon: Routledge, 2013), 189-204.

587 Ibid., 189.

588 Namita Gupta Wiggers, "Craft Performs," 28.

the politics of outsourcing. On display, there is an unspoken expectation that the residents will perform physical acts of making that elucidate the making processes behind the other exhibits that surround them. Yet, visitors to Twomey's 2011-12 residency frequently met with a scene typical of many modern workplaces: somebody sat at their computer, surrounded by paperwork and negotiating contracts via the internet. Processes that are obscured by familiarity when encountered in the workplace took on an otherness in the fully equipped technical studio. The residency, thus, spotlighted the rise of what Maurizio Lazzarato labelled "immaterial labour".⁵⁸⁹ A term that refers to "the labour that produces the informational and cultural content of commodities," it describes the move towards types of labour that demand skills that are grounded in the use of computers or cybernetics and the growing reliance on skills that were not traditionally regarded as work, such as tastemaking, social networking and public relations.⁵⁹⁰ Prospering under advanced capitalism and evidenced in the expansion of the service, entertainment and communication industries, it can appear to be easy or fun, masking exploitation. The blurring of the roles of the artist, curator and educator are also symptomatic of this phenomenon.

Twomey's studio tableau – particularly on the days when it was open to the public - resembled the works produced by artists who Bourriaud discussed under the banner of *Relational Aesthetics*, which he described as "an art taking as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and private space."⁵⁹¹ Such works include Rikrit Tiravanija's *Pad Thai* (1990), a situation in which the artist cooked meals for gallery visitors, to create a community based on sharing. Critics – Bishop in particular – have argued that these works focus on social impact at

589 Maurizio Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labour," trans. Paul Colilli & Ed Emory, in, *Radical Thought in Italy*, eds. Paolo Virno & Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 132-146.

590 Ibid.

591 Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, 14.

the expense of quality. Bishop also argues that they are complicit with the capitalist colonization of creativity and leisure by attempting to open up critical spaces using the tools and vocabularies of immaterial labour, rather than trying to stand outside of them.⁵⁹² However, although Twomey's characteristic methods of immaterial labour were close to – and in many cases drawn from – those of contemporary fine art practice, they were less easily reconciled with those that formed the backbone of the ceramic field. As a result, the lack of manufacture became hyper-visible within the ceramic studio, highlighting the fact that such labour is not immaterial, but takes the body as its material.⁵⁹³ Furthermore, although Twomey's emphasis on information exchange and forging interpersonal networks might be seen to align the resultant work – *Made in China* – with relational aesthetics, the residency space was framed as a working space, rather than a work in itself.⁵⁹⁴

In addition to spotlighting the working conditions of advanced capitalism, displacing manual production from the studio provided a means of addressing the implications of the relatively recent relocation of much of the UK's ceramic production overseas. Amongst other things, Twomey used her time in the residency space to oversee the production of 80 vases. 79 were decorated with floral and fake gold decals in Jingdezhen, China, where they were produced, and the remaining vase was decorated with 18-carat gold and hand-painted decoration, at the same cost as the entire Chinese group, at the Royal Crown Derby factory in the UK [fig. 41]. Bringing the resultant objects together in exhibitions that included *Thing Tang Trash: Upcycling in*

592 Clare Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," *October* 110 (2004) 51-79. This is something that Liam Gillick, one of the artists targeted in her riposte, has refuted. Instead, he has suggested that the unmanaged use of time stands counter to its regulation in the workplace. Liam Gillick, "The Good of Work," *e-flux*, no. 16 (2010), accessed July 27, 2015, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/the-good-of-work/>.

593 Claire Bishop, *Outsourcing Authenticity? Delegated Performance in Contemporary Art*, podcast audio, Untitled (labour): contemporary art and immaterial production, Tate Britain Auditorium, March 17, 2010, MP3, 22:20, accessed October 25, 2014, <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/conference/untitled-labour-contemporary-art-immaterial-production>.

594 Later in her residency, Twomey slip cast a large number of bowls, which went on to form the basis of a project titled *Why Make?* at the Louisiana State University in 2012.

Contemporary Ceramics at Permanenten (The West Norway Museum of Decorative Art) and *The British Ceramics Biennial*, Twomey opened up a dialogue between the branded face of the increasingly specialised and high-end British ceramics industry and its anonymous low-cost foreign competitor. Left to consider the differing material and aesthetic qualities of the vases and the values attached to them, visitors might also be prompted to question the global economic shifts that had normalised outsourced production and led to this disparity in financial and production values. Furnished with further information about the history of Jingdezhen - once the home of Imperial porcelain production in China, rather than the mass market wares on display - they might even think about how outsourcing had impacted on jobs, skills and lives on both sides of the geographical divide.⁵⁹⁵

Historian Ezra Shales has proposed that some practitioners are complicit in the exploitation of cheap, foreign labour on the grounds that they adopt an uncritical approach to the outsourcing of production.⁵⁹⁶ This is an accusation he levelled at Aylieff, who used workers at Mr Yu's Big Ware Factory in Jingdezhen to make massive pots "wheel thrown with phenomenal skill," which she later decorated with her contemporary take on blue and white.⁵⁹⁷ Although Aylieff built a relationship with the family that ran the factory, working there for several months, Shales claimed that she simply used them as tools to produce work that, when marketed under her name, sold for great sums. By contrast, ordering the vases remotely as a commercial buyer might, Twomey did not disguise the distance between her own position and the manual production of the work. Indeed, this aspect of her process was rendered visible in the museum. The title *Made in China* also placed Twomey's status as

⁵⁹⁵ This link has been made through critical discourse more than in the museum. For example, in Ezra Shales's paper, addressed below.

⁵⁹⁶ Ezra Shales, "Spode Conversations," British Ceramics Biennial, Spode factory site, Stoke-on-Trent, March 14, 2013.

⁵⁹⁷ Belinda Fisher, "Contemporary Applied Arts hosts Felicity Aylieff's first major solo show in London," Contemporary Applied Arts, accessed February 3, 2014, http://www.caa.org.uk/fileadmin/user_upload/photos/information/Press.

the declared author of the work in tension with the input of the anonymous makers subsumed under that ubiquitous stamp. Furthermore, compelled to provide making demonstrations as part of her residency, she focused on the craft of industrial mould-making and invited Gill, a worker from Wedgwood, to spend three hours in the open studio hand-painting the lines around plates. Drawing attention to the craft skills that underlie factory production, she exposed the false dichotomy between craft skill and industrial production. Nevertheless, as in Gates's work, she relinquished technical, rather than conceptual, of the work: something that accorded with the tenets – and elevated critical status- of fine art, rather than the crafts.

As addressed in chapter one, Adamson has argued that craft functioned as a parergon within modern art practice – an integral part of it, but one that had to remain secondary to its status as art in order to fulfil its purpose.⁵⁹⁸ However, it is fabrication – traditionally more closely aligned with industry than the crafts – that fulfils that function in much contemporary art. As detailed earlier, such highly finished production often comes at a prohibitive financial cost, excluding many young artists, who the current education system has also denied the opportunity to develop the technical skills to make their own works. Works like Twomey's, which explore the human interactions that are obscured by this veneer, might, therefore, be regarded as counterparts to Adamson's theoretical efforts to explore wider applications of craft as process, which recuperate skill. Certainly, the studio ceramic model of one named artist performing every aspect of the making process has dominated the ceramic field for so long that when Twomey's working process was exposed, the act of designation and seamless production created friction in a way that Aylieff's *Sense and Perception* could not. Yet, by upholding the centrality of clay, her work might be viewed as an attempt to re-draw, rather than break down, the parameters of the field, reincorporating approaches to medium that were excluded from existing models of the crafts.

598 Glenn Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft*, 1-37.

Whilst the V&A residency space puts ceramists' acts of making on display, a work comprised of components that were also made in China - Ai Wei Wei's *Sunflower Seeds* – put the visitors' productive role on display. In 2010, Ai filled Tate Modern's Turbine Hall with 100 million porcelain sunflower seeds. Like Twomey's vases, the 100 million porcelain seeds, that Ai filled the hall with were outsourced - each one hand-painted in Jingdezhen – providing a source of income for 1,600 people in the two and half years it took to complete them. However, whilst ceramic production provided the starting point for Twomey's work, in Ai's the anonymity of the workers fulfilled this role. En masse, the seeds projected an image of uniformity but on closer inspection, their individuality became evident.⁵⁹⁹ As the visitors interacted with the seeds, the relational development of individual and collective action became apparent. As museologist Helen Rees Leahy has proposed, the overwhelming scale of Tate Modern's Turbine Hall, which housed *Sunflower Seeds*, heightens the visitors' awareness of their own bodies and their haptic relationship with space, whilst the shared physical engagement with the work within it encourages "stranger sociality."⁶⁰⁰ In some cases, people observed those around them, looking for prompts on how to act, in others they followed their own instincts or engaged with the seeds within smaller familial or friends-based groups.

The visitors' encounter with the materiality of the work also had an unintended consequence, which aligned their bodies with those of the workers who had made the seeds. Initially, people were allowed to walk on the seeds, handling and exploring the subtle difference between them. However, their enthusiastic physical engagement threw up clouds of dust and the public were

⁵⁹⁹ Gormley's *Field* series, which is discussed in the next chapter, also worked on this premise.

⁶⁰⁰ Helen Rees Leahy, "Watch your step: embodiment and encounter at Tate Modern," in *Museum Materialities. Objects, Engagement, Interpretations*, 166. Rees Leahy took the term 'stranger sociality' from Michael Warner's essay "Public and Counterpublics," *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (2002): 49-90.

eventually barred from entering the work due to fears about its toxicity.⁶⁰¹ This raised questions about the working conditions of the Chinese workers: what about their health and safety? How was that catered for and was equal value placed on their lives?

Comparing *Sunflower Seeds* with Twomey's residency, which was framed, first and foremost, as ceramics, it becomes apparent that although both showcased alternative models of production; the type of making that created friction within the ceramics gallery was already commonplace outside of it. This raises questions about *Made in China* – did the tension between past models of studio ceramic practice and the pluralistic uses of clay in evidence today provided a limited window of opportunity, which gave Twomey a forum through which to address the implications of outsourcing? Or did it simply broaden the scope of what might be seen to constitute ceramic practice? If so, it could be argued that it naturalised the separation of ceramics and broader artistic practice, rather than attending to its constructed nature.

4. Unmaking

Whilst the practices addressed above have reframed ceramic production, other models of practice have deconstructed the relationship between clay, ceramic practice and objecthood. Often kept behind glass, which emphasises their physical vulnerability, ceramic objects are emblematic of the museum's obligation to care for their collections and hold them in trust for future generations. At the same time, whether complete or in shards, they often serve as the sole material survivals of past societies – imbuing fired clay objects with a sense of permanence and timelessness. Raw clay, by contrast is associated with the transience of nature, and forms the core of many narratives about creation, death and rebirth including those of the Golem and Prometheus. The resultant

601 Mark Brown, "Tate Modern rethinks Sunflower Seeds show after health fears," *Guardian*, October 15, 2010, accessed June 12, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2010/oct/15/tate-modern-sunflower-seeds-ban>.

tension between fragility and endurance has, therefore, provided a rich seam for ceramic practitioners. As they have mined it they have posed questions about financial and artistic value, as well as the institutionalisation of ceramic practice.

Objects have long presented museums with questions about the physical means of storage and preservation and – as discussed above – the best approaches to public presentation and interpretation. By the 1960s, though, fine art practitioners had begun to associate object status with vulnerability to capitalist and – often by extension – curatorial appropriation and exploitation. This contributed to the rise of ultra-conceptual art and what Lippard and John Chandler labelled the dematerialization of art.⁶⁰² Whilst, in some cases, the works produced had no concrete form, others evinced approaches to materiality that centred on process and transience. Adamson has suggested that the theories of artists such as Morris, who explored process as an end in itself, have great importance with regard to craft.

In his 1970 essay ‘Some Notes on the Phenomenology of Making,’ Morris proposed that categorising art according to the formal affinities between different types of production, rather than the finished product could be revelatory, expounding:

What the hand and arm motion can do in relation to flat surfaces is different from what hand, arms, and body movement can do in relation to objects in three dimensions. Such differences of engagement (and their extensions with technological means) amount to different forms of behaviour. In this light the artificiality of media-based distinctions falls away (painting, sculpture, dance, etc.). There are instead some activities that interact with surfaces, some with objects, some with objects and a temporal dimension, etc. To focus on the production end of art and to lift up the entire continuum of the

602 Lucy R. Lippard and John Chandler, “The Dematerialization of Art,” *Art International*, February 1968, 31-6.

process of making and find in it “forms” may result in anthropological designations rather than art categories.⁶⁰³

However, whilst this resonates with contemporary perspectives, in which craft is reframed as something that ‘exists in motion,’ process in ceramic practice was largely tied to formal concerns at the time when Morris was working.⁶⁰⁴ Contemporary investigations of ephemerality were rare and tended to result from experiments with the expressive properties of unfired clay or attempts to overcome the technical constraints of the firing process. For example, Hepburn’s *Materials Pieces* (1971), Peacock’s *Impact Imperative* (1980) and Mackness’s *Subungulate Garden* (1980), which were addressed in chapter four, were too large and physically unstable for the artists or institution to retain and do not survive.⁶⁰⁵ Furthermore, ceramic practitioners did not have such antagonistic relationships with the art market or the museum. When dissent was voiced it was largely due to low prices or lack of critical recognition, rather than commoditization.⁶⁰⁶ The established network of craft galleries-cum shops that provided the main outlet for contemporary ceramic practice by the 1970s also favoured the object. Indeed, faced by the collapse of medium specificity in the fine art sphere, a continued focus on the fired clay object might be seen to offer security, albeit illusory: a fact that may explain the ascendance of self-referential pottery in the 1980s.

Whilst design historian Linda Sandino has argued: “transience subverts the presumed timeless significance and value of the museum collection,” it might also be argued that it can challenge the institutionalisation of studio ceramic practice.⁶⁰⁷ Amongst the earliest practitioners to realise this, Astbury began to explore the symbolic properties of wet clay in the early 1990s. His

603 Robert Morris, “Some Notes on the Phenomenology of Making: The Search for the Motivated,” *Artforum*, no. 9 (1970): 62.

604 Glenn Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft*, 4.

605 Richard Mackness, email to Laura Breen, 5 March 2014; Percy Peacock, in discussion with the author, April 19, 2013.

606 *Ceramic Review*, “Sturdy Individualism,” *Ceramic Review*, no. 73 (1982): 3.

607 Linda Sandino, “Here Today, Gone Tomorrow. Transient Materiality in Contemporary Cultural Artefacts,” 289.

unfired objects, sealed inside damp containers made visible the imperceptible environmental conditions of the spaces they were installed in as condensation gathered and disappeared over time, much like Hans Haacke's *Condensation Cubes* (1963-65). In addition to this, often cast from mass-produced ceramic forms, they highlighted the variable composition and material qualities of the raw clay. Poised between raw clay and fired object, the works demonstrated that clay was just a medium, which might become something else as readily as a piece of ceramics. Evidencing Astbury's fascination with the archaeological, they also married the use of unfired clay as a symbol of the rise from, and return to, the earth, to the contradictory use of fired clay objects as something that can transcend death. Seemingly vulnerable in their unfired state, some of Astbury's casts have defied the passage of time and survived for decades, whilst others have collapsed, bearing the marks of their existence. They thus serve as metaphors for the way in which even objects that are stored in cases and unused are re-formed by the imperceptible contextual changes that surround them.

Of course, Astbury's works were self-contained and galleries and museums were accustomed to exhibiting far more challenging temporary and transient artworks by the point he produced them. As early as 1973, reflecting on her early utopian spirit, Lippard had admitted:

It seemed in 1969 that no one, not even a public greedy for novelty, would actually pay money, or much of it, for a Xerox sheet referring to an event past or never directly perceived, a group of photographs documenting an ephemeral situation or condition, a project for work never to be completed, words spoken but not recorded; it seemed that these artists would therefore be forcibly freed from the tyranny of a commodity status and market-orientation. Three years later, the major conceptualists are selling work for substantial sums here and in Europe; they are represented by (and still more unexpected—showing in) the world's most prestigious galleries.⁶⁰⁸

608 Lucy R. Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object From 1966 to 1972*, 263–26.

However, ceramic practice had not undergone such a transition. Although ostensibly portable and collectible, the acquisition of Astbury's works was conditional on the acceptance of physical change and the potential for formal disintegration. Duplicating familiar clay forms, the copies in his *Document* series also showed little external evidence of his considerable technical skill, resisting easy assimilation into the crafts.

Until recently, Astbury's works have had little impact on the domain he received his training in. Shown in the more liminal spaces of The Diorama Arts Studios (1995 and 1999) and Exeter's Spacex (2002), they operated at a remove from the circuits of validation and dominant histories of ceramics in Britain. However, as ceramics has become unhinged from craft, it has been re-evaluated. In 2011, Adamson declared 'Paul Astbury's work has, I think, been undervalued since he burst upon the scene in the 1970s as one of a generation of *enfants terribles* working in ceramics.'⁶⁰⁹ The same year, American gallerist and ceramic critic Garth Clark proposed:

Astbury's work continues to impress, yet his career has been something like a stealth fighter: streamlined, technologically progressive, and forcefully potent and directed – but often not seen. Sometimes remarkable series go unnoticed. Since his first exhibition in 1971, he has exhibited his work infrequently and yet has to be given the retrospective survey that he so deserves as a sculptor of international importance and unswerving momentum.⁶¹⁰

Non-ceramists were also drawn to the referential qualities of unfired clay and its impermanence. Many of these works, for example, Chen Zen's *Purification Room* (1995/2004), which was comprised of everyday furnishings coated in earth and which he described as "an archaeology of the future," and a work in Goldsworthy's *Clay Wall* series (1991-present), were included in the

609 Glenn Adamson, "Space Ship Derelict – Paul Astbury," Crafts Council, accessed May 12, 2013, <http://onviewonline.craftscouncil.org.uk/4040/object/P200>.

610 Garth Clark, Cindy Strauss, Glenn Adamson et al. *Shifting Paradigms in Contemporary Ceramics: The Garth Clark and Mark Del Vecchio Collection* (New Haven, Conn.; London: Yale University Press in association with the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 2012), 285.

exhibition *A Secret History of Clay*, which is addressed in the next chapter.⁶¹¹ Internationally, there had been earlier artistic incursions into clay and earth, which De Waal addressed in his associated publication *20th Century Ceramics*, examining works such as Kazuo Shiraga's *Challenging Mud* (1955), Walter Di Maria's *Earth Room* (1977) and Ryoji Koie's *Returning to Earth* (1980). Nevertheless, it was in tandem with the ascension of trained ceramists whose work featured material ephemerality, such as Twomey, Harrison and Cummings, that it became a mounting concern for those administering public ceramics collections in Britain. Whilst fine-art curators had been compelled to consider how to collect or document ephemeral practice in the 1960s and 70s, it was only in 2003 that the V&A's Graves acknowledged the issues posed by such practices, stating "it may be that collecting itself is not the most appropriate means of engagement and there may be other ways to do so – perhaps through exhibitions, or documentary means such as photography or video."⁶¹²

Twomey, whose work *Consciousness/Consciousness* featured in both De Waal's book and the exhibition, has produced numerous works that explore the ephemeral materiality of clay. In each case the fragility and erosion of the clay served a different purpose. Sited in a range of locations, such as The Eden Project, their transience gained an extra dimension in museums. This was exemplified by her 2009 work, *Scribe*, which was produced for *The House of Words* exhibition at Dr Johnson's House. Samuel⁶¹³ Johnson, a key eighteenth-century literary figure, was most famous for compiling a Dictionary of the English Language. A contemporary of Josiah Wedgwood, founder of the famous industrial ceramics firm, his life history, like Wedgwood's, has been

611 Galleria Continua, Press Release: Chen Zen – Purification Room, *Galleria Continua*, accessed June 6, 2012, www.galleriacontinua.com/attachments/mostra_173/pressrelease.doc.

612 Alun Graves, "Room 138," *Ceramic Review*, no. 201 (2003): 24.

613 "Dr Johnson's House: Collection," Dr Johnson's House, accessed July 18, 2014, <http://www.drjohnsonshouse.org/collection.html>. The founder of the museum, Cecil Harmsworth did not want the house to be filled with 'irrelevant 18th-century bric-a-brac', therefore, the collection was not assembled as a period reconstruction. : a museum with a collection of objects relating to the 18th-century writer who once lived there.

memorialised, but the histories of those who worked for him have been forgotten.

Invited to produce a work inspired by the story of the house and its former occupant, Twomey gathered a careful selection of objects associated with a group of those forgotten workers – his scribes – and covered them with a layer of Wedgwood blue jasper clay dust. The accumulated powder was symbolic of the passing of time, suggesting working life stopped in its tracks and the return of the human body to dust in death. It also marked the acute absence of the lives that animated those objects and the house. In doing so, the labour of those scribes and their contribution to Johnson's work became visible. Who sat at these desks, which were not longer decorative props, but, instead, work stations?

Scribe was 'well-made' in a sense highlighted by Jonathan Parsons, who has argued: "the aspect most crucial to the concept of well-made is the coeval development of a conception or idea with and through the most appropriate means of its realization."⁶¹⁴ However, it diverged from the typical 'piece of Wedgwood' that might be seen in a historic house. Made of fired clay, which was uncontained, by either vitrine, or three-dimensional form, the work threatened to spread into the house and the objects, becoming a physical part of their imperceptible material history. This may have heightened the potency of the work, but for the house's custodians it was a step too far. Instead, the artist and curators were compelled to construct the work underneath a polythene tent and contain the work within a framed table with a plexiglass top.⁶¹⁵ No longer inert and decorative, transformed to dust Wedgwood became a contaminant. It didn't threaten the curator's lives, as ceramic dust threatened the lives of factory workers who breathed it in, but it demonstrated the impact that the

614 Jonathan Parsons, *Approaching Content* (London: Crafts Council, 2003), 32. This catalogue accompanied an exhibition that marked the first UK exhibition of Twomey's work *Consciousness/Conscience*.

615 Tessa Peters and Janice West, "From the Uncanny Room to the House of Words," 23-24.

evolution of studio ceramic practice might have on curators who were accustomed to managing discrete objects.

Whilst *Scribe* took ephemerality as its starting point, seemingly enduring objects can also be shifted into the category of the transient, highlighting their materiality and the impossibility of halting the ravages of time. Laura Gray has described the destruction of ceramics in the museum as:

...an intellectual act that is concerned with critique (of the canon of art, of the boundaries of art, of cultural values) [which is] also viewed as a catalyst for change in the semiotic status of an object.⁶¹⁶

As she outlined, a number of high profile works that centre on the active destruction of ceramic objects have been produced since the 1990s. In one such work, *Use Value* (2001) Neil Cummings and Marysia Lewandowska piped the sound of clattering crockery, recorded in the V&A café, into the museum's foyer.⁶¹⁷ Culminating with a crash and a moment's silence, the recording brought home the fear of breaking ceramics in the museum. Continued on the fourth floor, the sounds lured visitors into the ceramics galleries. There, the sound of cups and plates being used revived the collections, prompting a consideration of 'use value' as per the work's title. It also prompted a consideration of what might be lost in the process of protecting the objects from the fate that befell the broken crockery in the first recording.

Other examples include Twomey's *Consciousness/Conscience* and Ai Wei Wei's *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn* (1995) – a series of three black and white photographic prints, which showed the artist doing exactly that and which was exhibited at the V&A Museum in 2011/12. It was displayed alongside other works in which Ai used historic ceramic objects as readymades – whether overpainting Neolithic vases, emblazoning a Coca Cola logo across them, or

616 Laura Gray, "No Construction without Destruction': Ceramics, Sculpture and Iconoclasm," in *Art and Destruction*, ed. Jennifer Walden (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2013), 10.

617 *Use Value* was part of *Give and Take* – a project for which conceptual artist Hans Haacke inserted objects from the V&A into new narratives at the Serpentine Gallery and Serpentine curator Lisa Corrin worked with contemporary artists in the V&A.

presenting their powdered remains for inspection. Presented in museums, which are committed to preserve and protect, these acts, which could be construed as vandalism, prompt a strong response. Ai owned the objects and was not damaging anything that belonged to the public, yet his actions symbolized the effacement of history. This was an issue that was particularly pertinent in Ai's native China, where reference to historic acts of protest, such as the 1989 Tiananmen Square uprising, in which Chinese state forces shot unarmed protestors, are censored. However, it can be applied to the Nazis' attempts to eradicate all traces of Judaism (and their own mass murder) during and after the Second World War and to acts of iconoclasm, from the destruction of Catholic artefacts during the Protestant Reformation to the contemporary destruction of ancient temples in the Middle East by Islamic separatists. As the Greek philosopher Plato famously wrote, "Those who tell the stories also hold the power" and that power moves way beyond the power to distinguish art from non-art.⁶¹⁸

Twomey and Ai both demonstrated the evocative power of the damaged, the imperfect and the destroyed and it might be argued that their statements were more poignant because they were sited in places that emphasise material survival over loss and absence. Beth Lord has argued that museums can act as Foucauldian heterotopias and proposed:

The museum brings together disparate objects from different times in a single space that attempts to enclose the totality of time – a totality that is protected from time's erosion. The museum thus engages in a double paradox: it contains infinite time in a finite space, and it is both a space of time and a 'timeless' space. What makes it a heterotopia, then, appears to be threefold: its juxtaposition of temporally discontinuous objects, its attempt to present the

618 Paul Orlowski, *Teaching about Hegemony: Race, Class and Democracy in the 21st Century* (London and New York: Springer, 2011), 55.

totality of time, and its isolation, as an entire space, from normal temporal continuity.⁶¹⁹

However, works that foreground the vulnerability of objects can undercut museums' ability to exert power in this way, challenging the premise of their commitment to preserve collections "in perpetuity" and, thus, their emphasis on protection over tactile access. Whilst Ai did this through focusing on breakage, Bouke De Vries achieves the same effect by highlighting the scars left behind. In contrast to the pots that Ai broke, which he owned, De Vries's *Vanitas (Exploded Teapot)* [fig. 42] is comprised of the fragments of a teapot from the collection of Pallant House Museum, which have been fixed together to mimic the moment it shattered. A trained museum conservator, De Vries fixed those parts together with conservation-grade materials, which could be reversed without causing any damage. He did not break, but, instead, recuperated an object whose damaged state meant that it no longer fulfilled the criteria that originally placed it in the decorative art collection.

Capitalizing on the narrative potential of the traces of the object's biography, De Vries re-imagined the moment of its fragmentation and visualizing its story. In doing so, he shifted the frame of reference to a different value system – that of social history. He also put the human weaknesses of the curator centre-stage and transformed a failure to fulfill the museum's duty to preserve the objects into its care into an interpretative asset. It was, therefore, more closely aligned with models of self-reflexive curatorship than the critical stance of Ai Wei Wei. Whilst Gray has proposed that De Vries's configuration denies the possibility of future function, it might equally be argued, that he re-functioned the teapot, rendering it more potent as a museum object than its undamaged counterparts, which had more straightforward histories of connoisseurial care.⁶²⁰

619 Beth Lord, "Foucault's Museum: Difference, Representation and Genealogy," *Museum and Society* 4, no. 1 (2006): 4.

620 Laura Gray, "No Construction without Destruction: Ceramics, Sculpture and Iconoclasm," 15.

Conclusion

Whether addressing the pedagogic or referential potential of materiality and process or foregrounding 'thinking through making,' the works and initiatives addressed above moved beyond the discrete object. Touch may enable a greater understanding of a work's construction or how a functional object might be used, yet it does not necessarily follow that such understandings are relevant to its reading as an artwork. Instead, unquestioning tactile engagement with ceramic objects might be seen to privilege craft values, such as skilled making, placing them at the core of the work's meaning. Initiatives that attempt to 'show making,' might help visitors to approximate the skill of the maker, relating it to their own experience of making and touch. However, if, as addressed in the previous chapter in relation to Stockmans' work, the meaning is in the making then why show the resultant objects in museums?

Residencies such as those offered by Camden Arts Centre provide rare opportunities to explore ceramic practice as an 'art of enquiry,' placing the making at centre-stage. This approach accords with the move towards relational art practice and modes of exposition that re-frame the gallery as a research space, as well as the growth of practice-based research within universities. It can challenge the ends-oriented nature and interpretative focus of many artist residencies, by demonstrating the value of experimentation. As Gates's work demonstrated, showing making can also serve as a highly-visible model of labour, which, when relocated to the gallery space, forms a platform through which to address wider issues that surround that subject. By contrast, in museum residency spaces, where ceramists are expected to demonstrate their making processes, absent, or unexpected acts of making can also raise questions about the rise of immaterial labour and the value of making.

Works that centre on un-making, capitalizing on the materiality of unfired clay or the destruction of ceramic objects can highlight the referential

value of ceramics. Foregrounding the powerful metaphorical value of decomposition or breaking, they can become potent sites through which to address issues of life, loss and the correlation between material survival and power: those whose material culture was regarded as worthy of preservation dominate the histories told through object-centred museums.

Exploring the power of the non-textual, of the processual and the untold, the examples discussed in this chapter might be seen to shift the focus away from object production towards the generation of meaning, narrative or discussion. For museums, with their extensive collections, privileging the immaterial risks creating a divide between historical role and contemporary practice. This may explain the rise in commissions that use the temporary and relational to interpret the historic. Supporting the former, but using it to stress the contemporary relevance of the latter, they provide a compromise. They may also allow institutions to shape the types of contemporary practice they show without reforming themselves: a fact highlighted by the predominance of the vitrine and plinth in the V&A's 2009/10 ceramics gallery development.

Certainly, the object remains. Whilst museums have long adjusted to the demands of ephemeral art practice, they pose issues for those accustomed to collecting craft objects. Rather than using ceramic objects as readymades, works such as *Sunflower Seeds*, *Made in China* and many of the examples addressed in previous chapters, from *Arcanum* to *The Charms of Lincolnshire* capitalize on the tension between object and context. Whilst the solution to this issue is beyond the scope of this thesis, the documentation and afterlife of such works, therefore, requires careful consideration if they are not, like their 1970s predecessors, who Lippard addressed, to be returned to the vitrines they have just escaped.⁶²¹

621 Although now taken off display, the birds from Twomey's *Trophy* were on display in the V&A ceramics gallery for a short period, decontextualized and aestheticized.

Chapter SIX: The medium-specific exhibition as a means of re-definition

Although public museums and galleries in Britain began to collect contemporary ceramics on a more sustained basis in the 1970s, they continued to use temporary exhibitions to address recent developments in practice. Whilst printed texts have played a marginal role in ceramic discourse until recent years, medium-specific shows have, therefore, served as ideological battlegrounds.⁶²² Operating at a tangent to existing discursive formations, they punctuate the history of ceramic practice in Britain in the period under discussion, providing opportunities to re-negotiate its horizons in relation to both new forms of clay practice and those outside its purview. As anthropologist Corinne Kratz has posited:

Producing and visiting exhibitions [...] can be ways people formulate and sometimes debate notions of quality, worth, and other social values and meanings. These processes entail judgments that help create hierarchies of merit and importance and define such broad fields as aesthetics, history, and morality, as well as particular political economies.⁶²³

Largely organized by contemporary ceramists and craft critics, these projects have re-shaped ceramic discourse from within, offering insights into its constitution at particular times. They might also be viewed as attempts to attract new critical audiences, raising the value and status of the art-oriented ceramic practices that were their core focus.

622 The predominant means of addressing contemporary practice in the museum since the late 1960s, temporary exhibitions allow museums to explore its rapidly changing terrain without the commitment of permanent acquisition. See James M Bradburne, "A New Strategic Approach to the Museum and its Relationship to Society," *Museum Management and Curatorship* 19, no. 1 (2001): 75-84.

623 Corinne A. Kratz, "Rhetorics of Value: Constituting Worth and Meaning Through Cultural Display," *Visual Anthropology Review* 27, no. 1 (2011): 21.

1. Ambiguity and re-definition

Produced at a pivotal moment when art-oriented ceramic practice was becoming more prevalent, but before the establishment of the Crafts Advisory Committee, Cartwright Hall's *Modern Ceramics '71* (1971) attempted to survey contemporary studio practice. Whilst the exhibition had no formal affiliation to the crafts, the selected practitioners remained united by their commitment to medium-specificity. However, the term 'ceramics' in the exhibition title was, as with *Ceramic Review*, which was founded a year earlier, explicitly chosen to indicate the diversification of practice and it focused on change, rather than tradition.⁶²⁴

In the accompanying catalogue, exhibition organizer John Thompson positioned the artists in *Modern Ceramics '71* within a lineage that included work from the USA, Germany and Japan, which he claimed had exerted a potent influence on British ceramics since the 1950s.⁶²⁵ The involvement of Hepburn – a vocal advocate of American ceramics whose articles and reviews in UK magazines such as *Ceramic Review* showed a higher level of critical engagement than most other writers in the field at the time – gave further weight to this proposal.⁶²⁶ Indeed, *The Guardian's* northern arts correspondent, Merete Bates, used an interview with him to link the use of clay as a means of expression in the show to similar developments in the USA.⁶²⁷

Discussing the work in the exhibition, Thompson suggested that it had become increasingly difficult to discern between pottery and sculpture in recent years.⁶²⁸ Despite this, the show was devoid of sculpture produced by those without ceramic training and addressed the work within the framework of

624 Bradford City Art Gallery & Museums, *Modern Ceramics '71* (Yorkshire: Bradford City Art Gallery & Museums, 1971).

625 Ibid.

626 Merete Bates, "Breakaway Clay," *Guardian*, May 21, 1971, accessed December 5, 2012, available from: Proquest www.proquest.com.

627 Ibid.

628 Bradford City Art Gallery & Museums, *Modern Ceramics '71*.

ceramics. This made it difficult to ascertain its merit in relation to the former category. Additionally, although *The Teacher's* description of the sculptural presentation of Hepburn's *Hanging and Performance* (1971), which required the viewer to stare through a 'building-site peephole', might be seen to support Thompson's standpoint, many of the works were small and fragile. They were, therefore, arranged in vitrines in a more traditional decorative arts approach.⁶²⁹ In this context, Thompson's rhetoric might be regarded as an attempt to differentiate these works from those with a Leach-inspired focus on the fusion of use and beauty.⁶³⁰ Whilst the latter risked falling into the category of what Danto called 'mere objects,'⁶³¹ which were "logically exempt from interpretation," and, therefore, critical attention, Thompson sought to elevate the status of the works in the exhibition by aligning them with sculpture, without engaging with the discourse around it: an issue later Hepburn tried to tackle in *Clay Sculpture* (1980).

Thompson claimed he was keen to show the diversity of the work being produced in clay at the time, selecting over 300 works that ranged from pots by Rie and Joanna Constantinidis to more idiosyncratic press-moulded objects by Astbury and sculptures by Hepburn and Graham Burr. It thus reflected current debates about the place of non-functional works within studio pottery.⁶³² The fact that the exhibition received the backing of Coper and Geoffrey Doonan – lecturers and artists who engaged with influences outside the Leach tradition – indicated that the exhibition's real achievement was to offer an alternative to the dominant mode of studio pottery practice.⁶³³ It was certainly more

629 *The Teacher*, "Dig this clay at Bradford," *The Teacher*, May 14, 1971, n.p.

630 Bernard Leach, *A Potter's Book*, 18. "It must always be remembered that the dissociation of use and beauty is a purely arbitrary thing. It is true that pots exist which are useful and not beautiful, and other that are beautiful and impractical; but neither of these extremes can be considered normal: the normal is a balanced combination of the two."

631 Arthur C. Danto, "The Transfiguration of the Commonplace," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 33, no. 2 (1974): 139.

632 David Canter, "From the Secretary's Desk," *Ceramic Review* 1 (1970): 2. This subject was the focus of Craftsmen Potter's Association secretary David Canter's introduction to the first issue of *Ceramic Review*.

633 Bradford City Art Gallery & Museums. *Modern Ceramics '71*.

successful in this respect than it was in showcasing diversity, with Bates describing the exhibition as 'a shifting initiative' and both she and local collector W.A. Ismay contending that its success derived from its move away from studio pottery in the Leach mould towards art-oriented ceramics.⁶³⁴

It was a year later that the V&A's Circulation Department presented its *International Ceramics* exhibition (1972), which was organized in association with the International Academy of Ceramics.⁶³⁵ Showcasing the work of practitioners from 38 countries, the exhibition provided one of the first opportunities for the British public to see the monumental works being produced in the USA up-close. However, although the use of 'ceramics' in the title accommodated a broad range of works, the relationship between the American works, in particular, and the more traditional studio pottery that predominated, was a source of debate. A member of the British Craftsmen Potters' Association (CPA) mused that few such works were intended to act as containers and that they might instead be regarded as sculpture due to their expressive or intellectual focus, or otherwise be viewed as ornaments.⁶³⁶ This stance foreshadows that taken by Dormer in the 1980s. It also highlighted the limited range of works that were regarded as 'ceramics' at the time, which was reflected in the museum's pottery-focused ceramics galleries, as well as the reviewer's comments.

International Ceramics was a more traditional survey show than *Modern Ceramics '71*, with works grouped by country of origin. The British exhibits were located in a separate exhibition space, which accommodated a greater number of objects. This approach allowed visitors to explore general trends, yet it severed the works from their international counterparts, masking the increasingly dialogic nature of ceramic practice in the UK and USA at the time.

634 Merete Bates, "Breakaway Clay"; William Alfred Ismay, "Modern Ceramics, 1971," *Ceramic Review*, no. 9 (1971): 15.

635 As discussed in chapter two, as main outlet for contemporary collecting at the V&A, The Circulation Department was actively engaged with current practice.

636 *Ceramic Review*, "Exhibitions," *Ceramic Review*, no. 16 (1972): 3.

The CPA helped to select the British entries, which caused some consternation: they had a highly conservative membership policy and their own exhibitions were far from progressive. Indeed, reviewer Hepburn suggested that there had been a failure to embrace the true range of international work in clay throughout the exhibition.⁶³⁷ Those he regarded as notable in their absence included Lowndes, John Mason, Ron Nagle and Ettore Sottsass, who have since been cited as important antecedents to today's 'expanded' ceramic practice.⁶³⁸ If, as Paul O'Neill has argued, "Curatorship is linked to processes of producing, constituting and instituting [art]," this 'gesture of showing,' constructed a tightly delimited view of 'ceramics,' which accommodated art-oriented work that had a clear relationship to pottery.⁶³⁹ The inclusion of Lowndes's mixed media pieces, Mason and Nagle's work, which had been accepted as sculpture on its own terms, and Sottsass's ceramic work, which was imbricated with design and popular culture, may have posed more challenging questions about medium-specificity.

The newly founded Crafts Advisory Committee's flagship exhibition *The Craftsman's Art* (1973) – also at the V&A – presented work by many of the artists from the exhibitions discussed above in an extremely different context. The exhibition layout, which was designed by Barry Mazur and Brian Griggs, brought diverse works together in a theatrical set that included silhouettes of trees, a bandstand with chairs and a tape recording of birdsong. They also employed materials, such as pine and coconut matting in tandem with a neutral colour palette, in order to convey nature. Whilst this appeared fashionable at the time, with hindsight, it might be seen to fall into Glenn Adamson's discussion of how craft exemplifies the dualism of the pastoral, "in which making a pot or a chair is valued not only in itself but also as a symbolic gesture

637 Tony Hepburn, "International Ceramics 1972," *Ceramic Review*, no. 17 (1972): 10-11.

638 Edmund De Waal, *20th Century Ceramics*; Garth Clark, Cindy Strauss, Glenn Adamson et al. *Shifting Paradigms in Contemporary Ceramics: The Garth Clark and Mark Del Vecchio Collection*.

639 Paul O' Neill, "Curating as a Medium of Artistic Practice: The Convergence of Art and Curatorial Practice since the 1990s," in *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, 87.

about the value of lifestyle, integrity and so forth – but also its tendency towards sentimental escapism.”⁶⁴⁰ This was the very trestle table and hessian image of the crafts that *Ceramic Review* claimed Mazur’s design escaped.⁶⁴¹ Nonetheless, the ambition of the design was unprecedented for a crafts show. Accompanied by a host of events and several private views, *The Craftsman’s Art* was a pivotal moment in the rebranding of the crafts, which led one member of V&A staff to remark that the CAC was using them “more shamelessly than a commercial concern would ever dream of doing.”⁶⁴² The Guardian’s Richard Carr (1973) similarly remarked upon the marketing aspect of the exhibition, describing it as a ‘super shop’. But it was also a shop window of another kind, which employed dramatic staging to weave diverse works into a homogenizing narrative that marketed the idea of the crafts as a fashionable entity.

The CAC’s remit, which aimed to move beyond the “reproduction of past styles and methods,” was, like *Modern Ceramics ’71*, defined in the negative, against the emulative approach epitomized by the Leach tradition, rather than by measurable criteria.⁶⁴³ As addressed in chapter four, his ambiguity led to a curious situation where it supported exhibitions that included craft media yet attempted to move beyond ‘the crafts.’ One such exhibition was Sunderland Arts Centre’s *State of Clay* (1978).

The title *State of Clay* represented a deliberate attempt to move away from the terms pottery and ceramics towards an understanding of clay that showed its wider application.⁶⁴⁴ Although the show focused on practitioners with ceramics training, all of the exhibits were explicitly non-utilitarian. Astbury’s use of press-moulded porcelain forms, and Barton’s bone china

640 Glenn Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft*, 104-5.

641 Eileen Lewenstein and Emmanuel Cooper, “Editorial. The Craftsman’s Art,” *Ceramic Review*, no. 23 (1973): 3.

642 A Dempsey to Mr W.G. Easeman (Museum Superintendent), January 1, 1973, The Craftsman’s Art, VX.1973.009, V&A archive, London.

643 Parliamentary Debates, House of Lords, 5th Series, vol. 323, 28 July 1971, Lord Eccles announces the formation of the Crafts Advisory Committee; Victor Margrie, “The work of the Crafts Advisory Committee,” *Museums Journal*, 74, no. 3 (1974): 117-118.

644 David Vaughan, in discussion with the author, 12 June 2013.

works, which were produced in collaboration with Wedgwood, challenged the ideological opposition to industrial process adopted by many studio ceramists: a stance that Adamson suggested was central to the 'invention of craft.'⁶⁴⁵ Others such as Lowndes and Peacock used experimental mixed media techniques.

Whilst Lowndes was an acknowledged influence on Peacock, having taught on his degree course at Bristol, *State of Clay*, again, showed that his attitude was equally aligned with sculptural discourse.⁶⁴⁶ For example, his artist's statement, which listed adjectives for describing clay and his actions upon it, recalled Richard Serra's *Verb List Compilation* (1967-68).⁶⁴⁷ Furthermore, with his assertion that "Clay is simply the most versatile material I have found for realizing my ideas," he prioritised the use clay as a means of expression over that of ceramics as a disciplinary frame.⁶⁴⁸ Peacock's work modular, floor-based pieces, such as *Impact Imperative* (1978) did not have a permanent formation, nor could glass casing usually reserved for fragile works protect them. These issues made installation difficult for the curators and although Peacock provided details about the scale and format of the work in advance, he was asked to install it himself on several occasions.⁶⁴⁹ It thus, challenged the conventions of 'showing' ceramics.

In her catalogue introduction the CAC's Marigold Colman stated that the exhibition aimed to create parity between clay sculpture and the Leach tradition.⁶⁵⁰ However, much like the Committee's 'artist craftsman', the term 'clay sculpture' was simply proffered as an alternative to the status quo. In this

645 Glenn Adamson, *The Invention of Craft*, xiii.

646 Percy Peacock, in discussion with the author, 19 April 2013.

647 Samantha Friedman, "To Collect," Museum of Modern Art, accessed October 12, 2014, http://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2011/10/20/to-collect. Serra's conceptual work *Verb List Compilation* was a list of "actions to relate to oneself, material, place, and process," which included 'to roll,' 'to dapple,' 'nature' and 'entropy.'

648 Percy Peacock, "Artist Statement," in *State of Clay: A Sunderland Arts Centre Touring Exhibition* (Sunderland: Sunderland Arts Centre, 1978), 39.

649 Percy Peacock, in discussion with the author, 19 April 2013.

650 Marigold Colman, "Introduction," in *State of Clay: A Sunderland Arts Centre Touring Exhibition*, 5-6.

context, the inclusion of a single terracotta maquette by RCA ceramics tutor and acclaimed sculptor Eduardo Paolozzi might be viewed as a token attempt to validate the other work as sculpture without forcing the work into direct critical comparison with its contemporaries in that field. Despite this, the same work gains a new resonance when read alongside co-curators David Vaughan and Tony Knipe's catalogue foreword, which discusses experimental approaches to medium and the potential to transcend disciplinary boundaries.⁶⁵¹ Whilst the exhibition did not represent the state of clay in all its applications, it did include work that challenged existing conceptions of ceramic practice: Peacock's work highlighted the reductive nature of medium-based comparisons and, along with Astbury's and Lowndes's work in particular, foregrounded experimental approaches to clay.

The mixed messages conveyed by the *State of Clay* exhibition, its curators and official backers manifested the tension between The Crafts Advisory Committee's support of innovative practice and its need to maintain the distinction of the crafts as a set of medium-based disciplines in order to gain funding. The emphasis on diversity and shared purpose in all of these exhibitions might be viewed as a declaration of presence, intended to destabilise the dominant histories of art through the production of alternative narratives, in line with similar initiatives by feminist artists. However, with efforts largely targeted at unseating the hegemonic studio pottery tradition the ensuing decade was to bring a continued focus on internal divisions. As Griselda Pollock has warned, such separatist approaches can lead to continued isolation from wider art historical discourse.⁶⁵²

651 Tony Knipe and David Vaughan, "Foreword," in *State of Clay: A Sunderland Arts Centre Touring Exhibition*, 3. For further discussion of how meaning is produced through exhibitions in relation to associated texts see Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and their Visitors* (London: Routledge, 1994), 115-139.

652 Griselda Pollock, "About Canons and Culture Wars," in *Differencing the Canon: Feminism and the Writing of Art's Histories* (London: Routledge, 1999), 7.

2. New standards

Some of the work in *State of Clay*, if not the accompanying rhetoric, indicated that ceramists were embracing the post-modern collapse of disciplinary boundaries. However, by the 1980s the Crafts Council held increasing sway over the type of ceramic work that was promoted and exhibited in Britain's public galleries. Whilst it continued to support the work of a range of practitioners, discussions about ceramics during this period were dominated by the concerns of those associated with 'The New Ceramics,' particularly, as discussed earlier, their interrogation of function and containment as subjects and the vessel's ornamental role. As Harrod has described, this clamour for innovation obscured earlier examples of expression through craft media, as if the model of the artist-craftsman, which the Council promoted, was an entirely new phenomenon.⁶⁵³

Like the accompanying seminars, which are addressed in chapter one, Dormer's *Fast Forward: New Directions in British Ceramics* (1985) brought the perceived dichotomy between Crafts Council-sponsored innovation and Leach inspired traditionalism together with explosive effects. Intensely didactic, the exhibition was laid out to provide a lineage for contemporary work that stood outside the Leach tradition. It was divided into two main sections: historical and modern, with Dormer suggesting that the historical section should be 'v. critical', showing 'how the modern generation had benefitted from and why they have reacted against their recent heritage.'⁶⁵⁴ Positioning himself as the arbiter of taste, Dormer then set out to demonstrate this argument through the exhibition's narrative.

The historical section of the exhibition was structured around Greenberg's notion that kitsch was something that watered down tradition by

653 Tanya Harrod, *The Crafts in Britain in the Twentieth Century*, 370.

654 Peter Dormer, Notebook re: ceramics exhibition ICA Spring '85. Preliminary ideas. Attn: Declan McGonagle.

adopting its effects without regard for its ideological origins.⁶⁵⁵ Dormer illustrated his thesis with objects, using Korean, Japanese and Chinese pots as the unmediated tradition at the pinnacle. He proposed that the work followed a downward trajectory from this point, beginning with Leach, who, he claimed, mistranslated the Japanese tradition and catalyzed the descent into kitsch. His narrative culminated in a phenomenon that he christened 'the ploughman's pot': a label intended to draw an analogy between the Anglo-Oriental pot and the Milk Marketing Board's invention of the ploughman's lunch.⁶⁵⁶ This was exemplified by the work of Bernard's son, David Leach.

Dormer's narrative also drew upon the theories of Eric Hobsbawm, who proposed that some traditions were invented in order to create a sense of continuity with the past.⁶⁵⁷ Their naturalisation could, he argued, derail the evolution of cultural practices and perpetuate models that are detached from contemporary life. This idea resonated with Dormer, who felt that the dominance of Leach's Anglo-Oriental orthodoxy had led to an elision of the fact that the primary function of pottery in contemporary life was decorative. By exposing the flaw in the standard that Leach laid out in *A Potter's Book*, he cleared a space in which to construct an alternative history, based on decorative traditions. He used the work of two potters to mark the transition between the historical and modern sections of the exhibition: in his notebook he explained "Very often kitsch has undermined ceramics. However [Michael] Cardew (English trad.) Coper (European) saved the day."⁶⁵⁸

Dormer's claim that there was a 'ceramics' to be undermined highlighted the hermeticism of his outlook. By adopting a linear trajectory he was able to identify Cardew and Coper as the inheritors of those traditions, and the starting

655 Clement Greenberg, "Avant-garde and Kitsch," *Partisan Review* 6, no. 5 (1939): 34-39.

656 Richard Eyre's film, *The Ploughman's Lunch*, which was based on a screenplay by Ian McEwan, brought the Milk Marketing Board's promotion of the ploughman's lunch – and debate about its authenticity – to public attention in 1983.

657 Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1983.

658 Peter Dormer, Notebook re: ceramics exhibition ICA Spring '85. Preliminary ideas. Attn: Declan McGonagle.

point for more recent work, without addressing extra-disciplinary influences. He extended this approach in the modern section of the exhibition, where he juxtaposed contemporary pots with historic objects in order to highlight stylistic affinities. His display strategies included making visual analogies between Janice Tchalenko's work and a sixteenth-century Palissy dish and the work of Cardew, Glen Lukens and Richard Slee. By doing so he positioned the new work as the logical next step in the evolution of particular decorative traditions. The inclusion of pieces from Tchalenko's collaboration with Dartington Pottery suggested that Dormer was also keen to explode the opposition of hand-made and industrial, which was at the core of the ideology that surrounded the crafts. Instead, he emphasized the works' shared status as pottery.

Dormer decided to work with the ICA in an attempt to market ceramics to a different audience. Nevertheless, he maintained that the modern pot was a minor art for domestic consumption, which was located between utility and ornament.⁶⁵⁹ This created a conflict between the message communicated by the traditional white cube exhibition space, which "subtracts all cues that interfere with the fact that [an object] is 'art,'"⁶⁶⁰ and Dormer's contention that the home was the true place for pottery. Furthermore, in attempting to demonstrate that the modern pot was not kitsch, the exhibition, like Britton's *Maker's Eye* essay and *Sèvres with Krazy Kat* appeared to be an argument that it was its opposite, thus meeting Greenberg's criteria for Modern art.⁶⁶¹

Alert to the fact that the small scale of many ceramic forms could leave them stranded in white cube spaces, Dormer attempted to counteract this by displaying blown up images of details from the smaller works above them. However, Poncelet's work, in particular, highlighted the destabilizing power of context. Dormer stressed that it would be an applied art, rather than sculpture

659 Peter Dormer, Notebook re: ceramics exhibition ICA Spring '85. Preliminary ideas. Attn: Declan McGonagle.

660 Brian O' Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, 14.

661 Alison Britton, "Untitled," in *The Maker's Eye*; Alison Britton, "Sèvres with Krazy Kat."

show and Paul Filmer's catalogue essay foregrounded the links between her technique and pottery. However, the work itself demanded open, plinth-based presentation, which emphasized its sculptural presence.⁶⁶²

The exhibition closed with works by Rie, Coper, and Bill Newland, which Dormer felt resisted "the craft fayre content of the post-war pottery revival," arranged on a series of plinths of different heights.⁶⁶³ By placing Newland, whose work engaged with design, architecture, figuration and decoration, on a pedestal alongside the celebrated pairing of Rie and Coper, Dormer afforded him a status on a par with these acknowledged greats.⁶⁶⁴ Situating the trio's work at the close of the show, he also positioned them as the polar opposite of the kitsch that opened it: an alternative standard, the precepts of which were crystallized in his book *The New Ceramics: Trends and Traditions*, which was published the following year.⁶⁶⁵

Whilst the free use of materials and the appropriation of forms by contemporary fine artists had rendered many of Greenberg's arguments about medium specificity and autonomy obsolete by the time of the exhibition, Dormer continued to use them as a reference point. In a draft for a text panel headed 'Familiar Forms' he wrote, "Pottery can offer delight or solace. But it is neither questioning. Nor subversive of the status quo."⁶⁶⁶ This argument turned Greenberg's claim that avant-garde art must challenge cultural norms on its head: whereas the lack of a critical edge had been seen to exclude and marginalize pottery from fine art discourse, Dormer embraced that separation and used it to argue for distinction. Yet, whilst the gallery space offered a space in which Dormer could make his argument for the modern pot as a form of art,

662 Paul Filmer, "Jacqui Poncelet," 28-32; Peter Dormer, Notebook re: ceramics exhibition ICA Spring '85. Preliminary ideas. Attn: Declan McGonagle.

663 Peter Dormer, Notebook re: ceramics exhibition ICA Spring '85. Preliminary ideas. Attn: Declan McGonagle.

664 Tanya Harrod, "The Forgotten '50s." Harrod's article, which has been credited with raising the profile of the group that became known as the 'Picassoettes,' (to which Newland belonged) was not published until 1989.

665 Peter Dormer, *The New Ceramics: Trends and Traditions* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986).

666 Peter Dormer, Notebook re: ceramics exhibition ICA Spring '85. Preliminary ideas. Attn: Declan McGonagle.

his version of pottery was vying for attention with alternative takes on the potted form.

The Serpentine Gallery's *Vessel* exhibition (1987), which is discussed in chapter four, formed a stark contrast to Dormer's take on the issue. Whilst Dormer set up to establish new precepts for pottery, organizer Antony Stokes proposed that *Vessel* would challenge "the spurious distinctions between the fine arts and the crafts."⁶⁶⁷ However, although craft critic Rosemary Hill felt that Stokes had achieved his goal of breaking down the barriers between 'craft' and 'art,' other critics, including the *Observer*'s William Feaver and the *Art Journal*'s Chris Murray, suggested that *Vessel*'s inclusive approach side stepped the continuing distinction between function and non-function through sculptural presentation.⁶⁶⁸ Viewed with this in mind, *Fast Forward* might be perceived as an attempt to argue for ceramics' place as a defined, modernist discipline at a time when traditional boundaries were being eroded: a situation Dormer would later admit he found problematic.⁶⁶⁹

The adoption of ceramic forms and materials by those without a commitment to their medium-specific use had a more direct impact on *The Raw and the Cooked: New Work in Clay in Britain* (1993). Prominent potter Alison Britton and critic and former *Crafts* magazine editor Martina Margetts curated the exhibition, which brought works by trained ceramists together with the clay works of established sculptors, at the invitation of The Museum of Modern Art, Oxford's Director; David Elliott.⁶⁷⁰ Produced eight years after *Fast Forward*, it focused on the artistic potential of the material.

667 Andrew Graham-Dixon, "The Blackboard Jungle," *Independent*, September 29, 1987, accessed June 5, 2013, <http://www.andrewgrahamdixon.com/archive/readArticle/1105>.

668 Rosemary Hill, *Kaleidoscope*, BBC Radio 4, September 10-11, 1987 (transcript), Serpentine Gallery archive; William Feaver, "Reflagging," *Observer*, September 13, 1987, 26; Chris Murray, "A Bit of a Mixed Vessel," *Art Journal*, September 30, 1987, 76.

669 Peter Dormer, *The New Ceramics: Trends and Traditions*, 2nd revised edition (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994), 195.

670 Margetts and Britton were not interviewed during the course of this research, which focuses on contemporary archival material, although they provided extensive feedback on the content of this chapter.

The initial premise of the venture, provisionally titled: *The Undomesticated Product: New Perimeters in British Ceramic Art* was to demonstrate that:

Those ceramics, intimate yet referential, which transcend the requirements of utility to deal with views of the world, rather than those of the home, and which unite the concerns of paintings and sculpture in volumetric, decorated forms, can be viewed as a branch of art.⁶⁷¹

This title and description explicitly declared the preconceptions of ceramic works that the curators hoped to challenge: that they were necessarily domestic and utilitarian. Indeed, the assertion that the type of ceramic practice the exhibition addressed could be viewed as a *branch* of art, might be interpreted as a continuation of the ideas that Britton set out in her 1981 text from *The Maker's Eye* catalogue, in which, she expressed the desire that self-referential works such as her own be viewed as a phenomenon that was "closely in line with 'modernism' in the other arts."⁶⁷² *The Undomesticated Product* proposal, albeit twelve years later, retained a similar preoccupation with elevating the artworld status of a particular area of ceramic practice, without eroding the distinction of medium-specificity. This was a narrative that museologist Helen Rees-Leahy remarked upon at the symposium that accompanied the eventual exhibition *The Raw and the Cooked*, professing:

I think that certain ceramists have been appropriated into the modernist project with hindsight because of a particular design philosophy with which they're working which in a sense made a connection with modernism.⁶⁷³

At the outset, the exhibition appeared to be a challenge to the epistemological basis of the overarching category of ceramics: an approach that had affinities to

671 Alison Britton and Martina Margetts, Draft exhibition proposal, 1991, *The Raw and the cooked* collection, Modern Art Oxford archive, Oxford.

672 Alison Britton, "Untitled," in *The Maker's Eye* (London: Crafts Council. 1981), 16.

673 Helen Rees-Leahy, Transcript of talk for *The Raw and the Cooked* symposium: Oxford Brookes University, 1994, *The Raw and the Cooked* collection, Modern Art Oxford archive, Oxford.

similar endeavours to separate artistic and practical photography in the 1970s.⁶⁷⁴ However, although the initial sobriquet favoured works such as Britton's, which emanated from the ceramic community and centred on the vessel as concept, its replacement, *The Raw and the Cooked: New Work in Clay in Britain*, could, and did, encompass a broader spectrum of work. Of those in the final show, Gormley, Cragg, Bruce McLean, Jefford Horrigan, Brian Illsley, Stephenie Bergman and – to a degree – Perry and Poncelet, had established careers outside of 'ceramics.'⁶⁷⁵ Nevertheless, although it is unlikely that any of these exhibitors would consider themselves part of the separate branch of art delineated in the original proposal, they were included in a grouping that was heavily weighted towards trained ceramists. Whilst the work of Astbury and Lowndes, in particular, did not adhere to medium-specific conventions, many of the others – people such as Britton, Fritsch, Ken Eastman, Gordon Baldwin and Angus Suttie – extended vessel traditions, in keeping with the original brief.⁶⁷⁶

When it came to selection, the works in *The Raw and the Cooked* were "chosen out of personal interest," based on the curators' understandings of ceramic practice at the time.⁶⁷⁷ They were then split into loose categories, which changed as the exhibition evolved, and which were not immediately apparent in the final displays. This approach avoided the pitfalls of choosing works to illustrate themes, rather than on their own merit. Nevertheless, by exposing the

674 Douglas Crimp, "Photographs at the End of Modernism," *On the Museum's Ruins*, 2-42.

675 Whilst Perry positioned himself in the fine art world, he, along with Illsley and Bergman, received attention in ceramics and craft publications and were not, therefore, entirely outside of its purview.

676 By contrast, Perry, worked within the confines of the English pottery tradition, exploiting its history, forms and domestic associations.

677 Alison Britton, "Use, Beauty, Ugliness and Irony," in *The Raw and the Cooked: New Work in Clay in Britain*, ed. Museum of Modern Art (Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1993), 10. These loose categories included, at various points, The Person, The Building, The Landscape, The Pot, then Transitional Objects; Abstraction; Landscape; Landscape of the Mind and Appearances; and also Tradition and Irony, Abstraction and the Hollow Form, Nature, Cultural Identity and the Figure. See exhibition notes and press releases in The Raw and the Cooked collection, Modern Art Oxford archive.

arbitrary nature of medium-based categorization, it also brought the exhibition's focus into question.

In a revised synopsis of the exhibition's aims Margetts underscored the fluidity of the divisions used to plan the show and the potential for cross-referencing works.⁶⁷⁸ By contrast, whilst Britton also acknowledged that some works "cut across categories," her description of the exhibition as "a synthesis, as a resolved combination of disparate ingredients, like a meal" suggested an integration that was lacking.⁶⁷⁹ Although she claimed that "the common ground is not just the substance of clay, but the common chemistry and technology that the practitioner has had to grasp with varying degrees of elaboration," the differing role that material played within each work, and the varied attitudes to technical prowess, challenged the logic of medium-based categorisation.⁶⁸⁰

Whilst this disharmony may have provided opportunities to consider the differences between the exhibits, John Pawson's design, which centred on white plinths, was used to situate the works in "as undomestic a setting as possible."⁶⁸¹ This represented a clear attempt to shift them from the category of crafts, into that of sculpture: something that Margetts argued for in her catalogue essay.⁶⁸² Indeed, Elliott professed that the white cube layout was designed to do exactly that, creating minimum interference with the work and forming a direct contrast with the massed ranks of ceramic vessels found in connoisseurial museum displays.⁶⁸³ As O'Doherty, in particular, has argued,

678 Martina Margetts, Revised synopsis, 1993, The Raw and the Cooked collection, Modern Art Oxford archive, Oxford.

679 Alison Britton, "Use, Beauty, Ugliness and Irony," 10. This analogy, grounded in Levi-Strauss's text, may have been based on his claim that socially constructed myths knit together oppositional elements. However, the exhibition, which explored a medium, rather than a system of relations, did not cohere around any single point.

680 Ibid., 10.

681 Alison Britton, Transcript of talk for The Raw and the Cooked symposium: Oxford Brookes University, 1994, The Raw and the Cooked collection, Modern Art Oxford archive, Oxford.

682 Martina Margetts, "Metamorphosis: The Culture of Ceramics," 15. Pawson is now famed for his minimalist approach to light and space. Margetts had admired the stark simplicity of his design for an exhibition of tools at the V&A and wanted a similar look.

683 David Elliott, letter to John Pawson, January 10, 1993, The Raw and the Cooked collection, Modern Art Oxford archive, Oxford.

this approach, often described in terms of transparency or neutrality, can perpetuate the myth of the autonomous artwork.⁶⁸⁴ It also encouraged visitors to address the works from an optical standpoint, rather than considering the more nuanced referential qualities of clay and the cultural construction of categories, which were signposted by the adoption of anthropologist Lévi Strauss's work *The Raw and the Cooked* for the exhibition title.

Elliott hoped the focus on the works engendered by the display would challenge conventional modes of categorization and, in the same vein, The Barbican press release presented it as "the first major exhibition to address the issue of how British artists working in clay have broken with the accepted notions and expectations of their place within the arts."⁶⁸⁵ However, the inclusion of work by prominent sculptors such as Gormley and Cragg challenged the idea that there *was* an expected place for artists who worked with clay at that point. These were not works that received marginal billing on their curriculum vitae, but constituent parts of their oeuvres alongside works in other media. Instead, the exhibition might be read as another venture to raise the art world status of works produced within the ceramic field, where medium-specificity still held sway. As reviewer David Whiting suggested:

the show perhaps paints a truer picture of the faltering ceramic push towards fine art – an interesting survey of those makers who, over the last twenty years or so, have tried to expand clay's vocabulary. Some have succeeded, many have not.⁶⁸⁶

In an analogous vein, another critic; Edward Lucie-Smith, viewed the exhibition as a rebellion against the patriarchal figure of Bernard Leach, which maintained many of his values; in particular the rejection of mass-production.⁶⁸⁷ This

684 Brian O' Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*.

685 David Elliott, letter to John Pawson, 10 January 1993, The Raw and the Cooked collection, Modern Art Oxford archive, Oxford; Barbican, Press Release, 1993, The Raw and the Cooked collection, Modern Art Oxford archive, Oxford.

686 David Whiting, "Thought provoking, but uneven choices...", *Studio Pottery*, no. 5 (1993): 10-14.

687 Edward Lucie-Smith, "The Raw and the Cooked," *Ceramic Review*, no. 143 (1993): 21.

accusation is partly borne out by the catalogue essays and archival papers, where Leach is repeatedly referenced as both an influence and a force, whose dominance had obscured the diversity of ceramic practice. Furthermore, although Margetts discussed its importance in her catalogue essay, there were no design products in this take on 'new work in clay.' Certainly, the scope of the exhibition was better defined by its exclusions, with Margetts suggesting there was no place for anybody "whose purpose was to make work in clay that was for use, only, primarily for use in a utilitarian way."⁶⁸⁸ However, whilst her text detailed how cultural relativism had opened the door to new understandings of disciplinarity, it also contained the dichotomous proposal that "Here clay is not a craft material, but an authentic medium for sculpture."⁶⁸⁹ In this light, the exhibition might, equally, be viewed as an attempt to counter 'the critical and institutional biases,' which she felt had inhibited the development of non-vessel based ceramic practice in Britain.⁶⁹⁰

A similar tension between heritage and ambition was evident throughout the curators' catalogue texts: whilst Margetts alluded to the expansion of artistic practice, addressing process and the experiential, she maintained the distinction 'ceramic art.'⁶⁹¹ Correspondingly, Britton claimed that ceramic objects were universally understandable, yet acknowledged the impossibility of assigning works to a single category.⁶⁹² If anything, the 'orchestrated collision,' in *The Raw and the Cooked* highlighted the lack of structure behind the notion of ceramic that they simultaneously deconstructed and upheld. Just as the white cube display operated in tension with the intertextual approach to selecting the exhibits the literature that surrounded it

688 Martina Margetts, Transcript of talk for The Raw and the Cooked symposium: Oxford Brookes University, The Raw and the Cooked collection, Modern Art Oxford archive, Oxford, 1994.

689 Martina Margetts, "Metamorphosis: the Culture of Ceramics," 15. Her use of the craft/sculpture opposition, which echoes Levi-Strauss's use of binary pairings, might also be regarded as a provocation.

690 Martina Margetts, "Metamorphosis: The Culture of Ceramics," 14.

691 Ibid., 13.

692 Alison Britton, "Use, Beauty, Ugliness and Irony," 10.

‘exposed’ the inadequacies and constraints of medium-based definition in the contemporary artistic landscape.

3. Expanding the Field

Whilst Dormer used historic objects in *Fast Forward*, their primary purpose was to illustrate his argument about contemporary ceramics. By contrast, other exhibitions have attempted to outline revisionist histories of ceramics, which included, but did not focus on, contemporary ceramics.

Manchester City Art Gallery’s *Out of Clay: Creations in Clay by Artists, Potters and Sculptors* (1988) took a less prescriptive approach to medium. The exhibition mixed contemporary work with historic and ethnographic material and the principle criteria were to explore “how the maker has effectively expressed something about the nature of material or revealed an aspect of themselves in the work.”⁶⁹³ Key participants, such as Kate Malone, Lowndes and Andy Goldsworthy were explicitly courted, but the curators also placed an advertisement in the December 1987 edition of the *Artist’s Newsletter* requesting contemporary submissions for the exhibition.⁶⁹⁴ This strategy, which targeted artists who had worked in clay, but who may not self-define as ceramists, evinced a more inclusive thematic approach than the exhibitions discussed previously. The historic and ethnographic material was also carefully selected to illustrate the exhibition’s premise, as correspondence between the gallery’s Keeper of Exhibitions, Howard Smith, and key lenders demonstrates. In those communications, Smith proposed that a Copeland figure of *Night* (1873) was a “tour de force of modeller’s skill [that] makes an excellent point about the specific qualities of parian” and that Ghisha Koenig’s “use of clay as a material

693 Howard Smith, letter to Janet Yap, Waddington Galleries, March 28, 1988, Out of Clay exhibition archive, Manchester City Art Gallery.

694 Jefford Horrigan, letter to Howard Smith, January 11, 1988, Out of Clay exhibition archive, Manchester City Art Gallery.

in its own right and as a precursor for casting seems perfect for the show.”⁶⁹⁵ He also rejected works by high-profile artists, such as Joan Miro, that did not fit with the themes of the exhibition.⁶⁹⁶

Out of Clay was comprised of 166 works from different historical periods. They were arranged together in smaller displays that addressed affinities and influence, which were dispersed between three key themes: Figure, Vessel, and Material. The Material section acted as an introduction, exploring the different properties of clay, largely in terms of technique. It included subsections on specific techniques such as moulded clay, which were further divided to explore the different ways that the techniques could be applied. By organising the section in this way the curators were able to show how techniques operated across traditional categories, drawing analogies between Jacqueline Poncelet’s *Tall Bowl* (1974), a Copeland Parianware figure (1876) and rubber glove formers made by A.G. Hackney manufacturers (1983) in one section and Paul Astbury’s press-moulded *Terminal Rock* (1975) and a pair of Capodimonte figures (1745-50) in another.

The Vessel section included displays on ritual figures and the contested category of clay sculpture – the latter further subdivided into sections on symbolic images, decorative modelling and folk art and its influences. However, the curators were keen to distinguish historic ritual figures from those that used symbolic form for conceptual reference, which they addressed as sculpture. This broader view of the integrative practice of ceramics was closely aligned with that outlined in Rawson’s *Ceramics* (1971).⁶⁹⁷ Rather than focusing on institutionalized and art-oriented forms of practice, the curators acknowledged that ceramic process could be used to vastly different ends and within a range of value frameworks.

⁶⁹⁵ Howard Smith, letter to J.V.G. Mallett, January 22, 1988 and Howard Smith, letter to Ghisha Koenig, January 14, 1988, Out of Clay exhibition archive, Manchester City Art Gallery.

⁶⁹⁶ Howard Smith, letter to Janet Yap, Waddington Galleries, March 28, 1988, Out of Clay exhibition archive, Manchester City Art Gallery.

⁶⁹⁷ Philip Rawson, *Ceramics*.

In the final section the curators broke the vessel category down into ritual vessels, non-functional vessels, and the figure-vessel relationship. Like Dormer in *Fast Forward*, the curators examined the vessel's function as ornament and included works by some of the same artists, such as Rie and Fritsch. However, the non-functional vessel section also included more conceptually-oriented works, such as Rod Bugg's *Thrown Together*: an assemblage of broken ceramic shards, which was selected as 'an interesting and witty statement' and Laurie Jo Wright's *60 Plates for Manchester*: an installation that capitalised on the tension between the emotional resonance and affective power of worn surfaces and the intimidating quality of massed ranks of objects.⁶⁹⁸

Out of Clay also included works that were not made of clay, but had 'clay characteristics.'⁶⁹⁹ This may reflect the conceptual influence of the *Vessel* exhibition, the organizer of which, Anthony Stokes had suggested suitable artists to Smith and provided him with their contact details.⁷⁰⁰ A sub-section of the Material category, which was intended to reference clay's natural state, was comprised solely of photographic works: one documented Andy Goldsworthy's *Earth, Clay, Crack, Line* – a site-specific intervention in the landscape at Yorkshire Sculpture Park (1987) and the other, Stuart Brisley's *Survival in Alien Circumstances* (1977-81), was a record of a performance art piece from the 1977 *Documenta* exhibition, which featured a hole dug out of the earth. There was also a separate section on clay in bronze, which looked at the loss of detail that occurs when a clay maquette is cast in bronze how the surface of the clay is captured in the eventual piece. This approach positioned the clay version as the original, rather than as a throwaway preliminary sketch for a finished article in

698 Howard Smith, letter to Rod Bugg, May 26, 1988, Out of Clay exhibition archive, Manchester City Art Gallery.

699 Manchester City Art Gallery, *Out of Clay. Creations in Clay by Artists, Potters and Sculptors* (Manchester: Manchester City Art Gallery, 1988). n.p.

700 Anthony Stokes, letter to Howard Smith, November 17, 1987, Out of Clay exhibition archive, Manchester City Art Gallery.

a more prestigious material, imbuing it with the aura of the original and elevating its status.

Whilst the broad scope of *Out of Clay* led to some imbalances – several sections contained no contemporary pieces and the industrial products were largely pre-twentieth century – the list of loans demonstrated how the exhibition cut across institutional divisions and internal categories, featuring commercial fine art galleries, contemporary artists and the antiquities, ceramics and oriental departments of museums. Works by several makers also appeared in multiple categories within the exhibition. For example, Poncelet's work was displayed as both moulded clay and sculpture. However, such diversity demanded a mixed presentation: some exhibits were in cases, but many were on open display atop plinths, whilst others were wall-mounted or stand-alone installations. There were A2 text panels providing an introduction and information about each section, but individual labels were grouped, and often dislocated from the work. For Guardian art critic Robert Clark the overall approach, which was exploratory, rather than didactic, resulted in confusion, adding:

There's something curious about focusing on a single material in any case – it's a bit like holding a show called *Out of Metal* and including everything from a wrought iron gate to a Giacometti bronze.⁷⁰¹

Yet, whilst this type of response had been an unintended consequence for the curators of *The Raw and the Cooked*, *Out of Clay* was consciously latitudinous, with the organisers declaring: "Rather than offer a definitive view of the conventional use of clay, the exhibition attempts to show how clay has been pushed to its limits."⁷⁰² As a game-changer, it might, therefore, be viewed as a success; its very incoherence reflecting the plurality of clay practice and the limitations of using material as the sole lens through which to address work. In her review, critic Pennina Barnett, instead, applauded the curious

701 Robert Clark, "Master Classes in the Clay School," *Guardian*, September 13, 1988, 17.

702 Manchester City Art Gallery, *Out of Clay. Creations in Clay by Artists, Potters and Sculptors*. n.p.

juxtapositions and play across chronological boundaries and artistic hierarchies.⁷⁰³ She had explored the inadequacies of existing terminology and modes of categorisation in the face of pluralistic contemporary practices for the equally progressive exhibition *Craft Matters* at the John Hansard Gallery two years earlier.⁷⁰⁴ Rather than regarding the focus on medium as an oddity, as Clark did, she understood the repercussions that a broader outlook might have for those whose artistic and institutional identities were founded on a more tightly defined take on 'ceramics' as an artistic medium.

Whilst *Out of Clay* represented the pluralistic nature of ceramic practice, it was another exhibition, spearheaded by a ceramist – that came to symbolize the establishment of the 'expanded field' of ceramic practice in Britain, wrestling it back into fine art territory.⁷⁰⁵ *A Secret History of Clay: from Gauguin to Gormley* was mounted by Tate Liverpool in 2004 and the gallery's head of exhibitions Simon Groom co-curated the exhibition with De Waal. Like the latter's book *20th Century Ceramics*, which provided its starting point, the exhibition had a chronological layout and explored how artists within established art historical movements had used clay.⁷⁰⁶ However, whilst *20th Century Ceramics* also included industrial and studio pottery, most of the precedents in the exhibition – including the artists named in the title - were drawn from the world of fine art.

Groom took the vessel as a key motif in the exhibition, partly, he admitted, because he was frustrated by the hermetic craft discourse that surrounded it.⁷⁰⁷ He intended to challenge this insular approach by creating a narrative that exploded outwards from Gauguin's traditional vessel forms, through increasingly larger and more ambiguous works such as those of Cragg

703 Pennina Barnett, "Out of Clay. Creations in Clay by Artists, Potters and Sculptors," *Crafts*, no. 101 (1989): 58-59.

704 Pennina Barnett, "Art or Craft...Who Decides?" in *Craft Matters: 3 Attitudes to Contemporary Craft*, ed. John Hansard Gallery (Southampton: John Hansard Gallery and WSCAD, 1985), n.p.

705 Peter Lewis, "Fired Up: Ceramics and Meaning," in *Fired Up: Ceramics and Meaning*, ed. Gallery Oldham (Gallery Oldham, Oldham: 2010), 5-7.

706 Edmund De Waal, *20th Century Ceramics*.

707 Simon Groom, in discussion with the author, 12 March 2013.

and Richard Deacon, before returning the visitor to the domestic-scaled vessel with a renewed perspective.⁷⁰⁸ This transition was emphasized by the placement of Twomey's installation *Consciousness/Conscience* (2004) in the doorway to the final section. Forced to step on the bone china tiles if they wanted to view the rest of the exhibition, they engaged with the materiality of clay and broke the taboo of smashing ceramics within a gallery.

Twomey's work led to a room set filled with ceramic objects, which ranged from Slee's brooms, balanced against the wall, to Frances Upritchard's found and re-purposed stoneware jars, which were displayed in a glass-fronted cabinet. Groom wanted this section to look as domestic and far from a museum environment as possible: an approach that contrasted with that of *The Raw and the Cooked*, where domestic associations were explicitly avoided.⁷⁰⁹ However, it is notable that although James Turrell's *Lapsed Quaker Ware* (1998) and Cindy Sherman's *Madame du Pompadour* tea service (1989-1991) were housed in a glass-fronted case, Andrew Lord asked for his *Profile Vase (Duchamp) 'The Recovery of Meaning'* (2002) not to be displayed in this way.⁷¹⁰ This move by Lord – a trained ceramist who, as discussed earlier, had successfully used sculptural display and the art gallery context as means of communicating the non-functionality of his vessel-based works – again highlighted their susceptibility to curatorial re-authoring.⁷¹¹ Torn from the frame he had determined for the work and attached to a biography that reinforced his ceramic training, his vase might be read according to the laws of that domain – as a vase. His fierce reaction suggested that the hierarchical distinction between the home as subject

708 Simon Groom, "Terra incognita," in *A Secret History of Clay from Gauguin to Gormley*, eds. Edmund De Waal and Simon Groom (Liverpool: Tate Publishing, 2004), 15-18.

709 Simon Groom, email to Mark Lomas at Doncaster Museum, 6 May, 2004, Tate archive.

710 Simon Groom, in discussion with the author.

711 When Groom and De Waal, replaced the heavy wire armature of his *Profile Vase (Duchamp) 'The Recovery of Meaning'* (2002) and placed it on a roped-off side table they hoped to create a dialogue with the domestic history of ceramics. For Lord it was a curatorial attempt to return his work to a decorative origin that it never had and, therefore, obliterated the work. See Edmund De Waal and Simon Groom (eds.) *A Secret History of Clay from Gauguin to Gormley*, 36; Simon Groom, in discussion with the author; Dawn Ades, *Andrew Lord* (Milton Keynes: Milton Keynes Gallery, 2010), 19.

and destination as outlined in the previous chapter, continued to impact on his practice.⁷¹²

Tate Director Christoph Grunenberg described *A Secret History of Clay* as “The first exhibition to present artists who have worked in clay from the beginning of the twentieth century to the present day.”⁷¹³ However, it largely centred on works by artists who had established places in the canonical histories of art. Contemporary practitioners with a ceramics-specific focus were only admitted to the category of “artists who have worked in clay” to a noticeable degree in the final section. Here, their work was seen to overlap with dominant artworld approaches, rather than vice-versa. Furthermore, whilst staging this exhibition at Tate - an archetypal modern art gallery - might be seen to signal the consecration of recent ceramic practice as art, it was relegated to a regional outpost and stood apart from permanent collections displays, leaving the galleries’ core narratives intact.⁷¹⁴

Although De Waal asserted that the exhibition offered just one possible history of clay, it constructed a heritage for art-oriented contemporary practice, which collapsed the status-limiting distinction between medium-led and concept-led practices.⁷¹⁵ Krauss observed the emergence of comparable root-seeking strategies, which she regarded as attempts to re-establish boundaries, in response to the expansion of sculptural practice.⁷¹⁶ The exhibition also, therefore, conformed to Griselda Pollock’s description of canon building, forging a “retrospectively legitimating backbone of a cultural and political

712 See Colin Painter, “Introduction,” in *Contemporary Art and the Home*, ed. Colin Painter (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2002), 1-6.

713 Christoph Grunenberg, “Introduction,” in *A Secret History of Clay from Gauguin to Gormley*, 9.

714 The reflexive values promoted by Tate Liverpool, which was founded amidst the social and political unrest of the 1980s, operated in opposition to the traditional values that legitimized Tate Britain. See Andrew Dewdney, David Dibosa and Victoria Walsh, eds. *Post-Critical Museology. Theory and Practice in the Art Museum* (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2013), 715; Edmund De Waal, ‘High Unseriousness: Artists and Clay’ in *A Secret History of Clay from Gauguin to Gormley*, 38-54.

716 Rosalind Krauss, “Sculpture in the Expanded Field,” 32. ‘No sooner had minimal sculpture appeared on the horizon of the aesthetic experience of the 1960s, than criticism began to construct a paternity for this work, a set of constructivist fathers who could legitimize and thereby authenticate the strangeness of these objects.’

identity, a consolidated narrative of origin, conferring authority on the texts selected to naturalize this function."⁷¹⁷ Situated towards the exit, De Waal's *Porcelain Wall* appeared as the latest manifestation - or even the apotheosis - of this particular history of ceramics.⁷¹⁸ Nonetheless, he also had to contend with the impact that his vitae had on readings of his work.

Composed of multiple ceramic cylinders, which he had hand-thrown, the values embodied in De Waal's work formed an illuminating contrast with the expanded model of authorship evidenced in Gormley's *Field* (1991), which was sited on the second floor. For Gormley each figure - made by a different individual - was a component of an artwork that he had choreographed, whereas De Waal was attempting to navigate the territory between the hand-making of objects and authorship of an artwork. A mocked-up design for the private view invitation, which incorporated fingerprints, was vetoed on the grounds that it had craft associations, rather than art. Yet, the text panel that accompanied Gormley's *Field* (1991) stressed that each of the 35,000 figures were handcrafted.⁷¹⁹ Furthermore, De Waal employed an in-built framing device to ensure his work was read sculpturally, privileging the overall concept, whilst the evidence of outsourced hand-making served conceptual ends in Gormley's work.

De Waal, whose pottery-centred vitae placed him firmly in the 'ceramics' camp, thus used the exhibition as frame and a physical frame to distance his handcrafted objects from craft, whereas Gormley's sculpture-centred biography framed his work as art from the outset, giving him greater creative freedom. In his catalogue essay, Groom pronounced that shifts in context and display had rendered traditional distinctions between art and craft irrelevant.⁷²⁰ Drawing on Pollock, it might, instead, be argued that we are 'after' rather than 'post'

717 Griselda Pollock, "About Canons and Culture Wars," 3.

718 Although De Waal's book does not feature his own work, Groom felt it was essential to include it in the exhibition. Simon Groom, in discussion with the author.

719 Handwritten note, undated, Tate archive, London, UK.

720 Simon Groom, "Terra incognita," in *A Secret History of Clay from Gauguin to Gormley*, 15-18.

modernism and that the historic distinctions between art and craft continue to shape the discourse around ceramics.⁷²¹ However, they do so largely from within.

In a retrospective interview about the exhibition, Groom admitted: 'the more you look, the more artists do work in clay, and so it becomes a bit ridiculous. It's a bit like putting on a show of painting or something.'⁷²² This echoed both critic Robert Clark's response to *Out of Clay* and the words of Barbara Zucker, co-founder of the USA's first all-female co-operative gallery (AIR), who posited that, although it was obvious with hindsight, it was necessary to declare this work's presence in order to show that it existed.⁷²³ However, whilst De Waal claimed that the collaboration between fine artists and ceramists had been excluded from history, this accusation might equally be levelled at the institutions and publications that have forged the histories of ceramics.⁷²⁴ In a preview of the exhibition for *Crafts* magazine, Harrod suggested that the exhibition might be a wake-up call for studio ceramists, as it showed clay work by successful artists whose practice was not ceramic-centric.⁷²⁵ The subsequent prominence of the exhibition in the critical discourse around ceramics, when compared with its minimal impact on the canonical histories of art, indicates that this was its real achievement.⁷²⁶

721 Griselda Pollock, "Un-framing the Modern: Critical Space/Public Possibility," in *Museums after Modernism: Strategies of Engagement*, eds. Griselda Pollock and Joyce Zemans (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 1-39.

722 Simon Groom, in discussion with the author, 12 March 2013.

723 Sandy Nairne, "The institutionalization of dissent," in *Thinking about Exhibitions*, ed. Bruce W. Ferguson, Reesa Greenberg and Sandy Nairne (London; New York: Routledge, 1996), 387-410.

724 Edmund De Waal, "In Discussion with Laurie Britton: Rethinking Clay Symposium, Tate Liverpool, June 5 2004," *Ceramic Review*, no. 209 (2004): 61. 'Ironically, it is the postwar history of ceramics itself, as much as the absence of a sympathetic cultural context, which has delayed the present coming of age of British ceramic art.' This is something Margetts also suggested in the *Raw and the Cooked* catalogue. Martina Margetts, "Metamorphosis: The Culture of Ceramics," 13.

725 Tanya Harrod, "Hidden Depths: A Secret History of Clay," *Crafts*, no. 189 (2004), 29-32.

726 See, for example, Andrew Livingstone, *Authenticity of Clay and its Re-definition Within Contemporary Practice: Ceramic Familiarity and the Contribution to Expansion*, unpublished PhD thesis, Northern Ireland: University of Ulster, 2008; Wendy Patricia Tuxill, *A Re-Conceptualisation of Contemporary Sculptural Ceramics from a Post-Minimal Perspective*,

4. Ceramics as site

A Secret History of Clay was produced on the cusp of change: the Crafts Council had repositioned itself with regard to both artistic media and exhibitions when it became a client of the Arts Council at the dawn of the twenty-first century. After its own exhibition space was closed in 2006 it began to work more closely with established museums to facilitate shows such as *Out of the Ordinary: Spectacular Craft* (2007) and *The Power of Making* (2011) at the V&A. These exhibitions illustrated how craft processes could be employed to a host of ends, which moved beyond traditional craft media and forms. They were also part of the broader critical efforts to reframe craft as a verb.⁷²⁷ Born amidst this climate, *Possibilities and Losses: Transitions in Clay* – an exhibition staged by Middleborough Institute of Modern Art in association with The Crafts Council in 2009 – reflected both the contemporary intellectual current and the Craft Council's new role.

Possibilities and Losses developed from ceramist Clare Twomey's proposal for a show that would dovetail with her academic research into artists that worked with installation, clay and craft. Twomey and senior curator James Beighton produced the exhibition together, with Beighton selecting Twomey's *Monument* (2009) as a starting point. The work, which Twomey was producing for the Zuiderzee Museum in Holland at the time, was comprised of a pile of ceramic waste from the Johnson Tiles Factory in Stoke-on-Trent. En masse, the fragmentary, broken and rejected objects attained a colossal presence. The work resounded with questions about human mortality and commemoration as well as referencing the decline of the British ceramics industry. However, rather than providing a fixed and insurmountable inheritance, Twomey's take on the past was a temporary agglomeration. A testament to past loss that threatened

unpublished PhD thesis, Hertfordshire: University of Hertfordshire, 2010; Laura Gray, "On the Transgressive Nature of Ceramics," *Ceramics: Art and Perception*, 89, 2012, 100-103.

⁷²⁷ Glenn Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft*, 4.

collapse rather than offering the illusion of permanence, it became material for the present: something that was highlighted in the exhibition's titular emphasis on the idea of *transition*. Furthermore, in taking ceramics as material and subject and deferring the production of the clay objects to unseen craftspeople in industry, *Monument* also raised questions about Twomey's identity as a ceramist.

Beighton and Twomey were keenly aware that the exhibition had the potential to perpetuate existing medium-based divisions and did not want to produce a survey show. Rather than trying to balance the need for structural organization with the diversity of practices, they reduced its scope to "four artists, four rooms, four possibilities."⁷²⁸ Taking *Monument* as a starting point, they turned to a pre-existing list of artists who they would like to work with, selecting works that were united more by conceptual affinity than discipline-specific criteria. However, the parameters of the research project, which was centred on ceramics, might be seen to limit their freedom in this area. It thus reflected the ways in which the statements that the artist and curator make can be delimited by institutional frameworks.

Fragmentary or process-based, the works in the exhibition confronted the idea of the discrete and innocuous decorative art object. One of the electrical circuits in Keith Harrison's *Brother* (2009) failed during a live firing with a full school group in situ, necessitating an evacuation of the building. Twomey's *Monument* (2009), an 8-metre tall pitcher pile of broken ceramic objects, also required constant invigilation. Similarly, Neil Brownsword's *Salvage Series* (2005) focused on industrial detritus: detached from context, the fragments of industrial waste became beautiful artefacts. However, for the final artist Linda Sormin, the confrontation with museum norms was more explicit: curator Beighton was invited to crawl through the paths made available to him on opening night and attack the work with a hammer. Responding to the work, Adamson asked:

⁷²⁸ James Beighton, in discussion with the author, April 15, 2013.

Once a museum has staged a ceramic exhibition where most of the clay is either unfired or broken, and which features a curator smashing a sculpture into bits, how in all decency can it go back to placing lovely vessels on plinths?⁷²⁹

Adamson also proposed that the four artists in the exhibition had taken on the role of 'self-conscious outsiders,' arguing that this gave them a fresh perspective on medium and describing Brownsword as 'The Historian', Sormin as 'The Immigrant', Harrison as 'The Alien' and Twomey as 'The Curator.'⁷³⁰ Nevertheless, as artists with ceramic training whose works are mainly addressed through the discourse on ceramics and craft, these roles were only assumed. Equally, the answer to Adamson's question about the works on display depended on them being read in relationship to existing perceptions of ceramics, as such norms had already been challenged in other areas of art practice.

Describing the artists, as 'other' to the dominant field of ceramics, Adamson's text might be seen to fall into the previously discussed trap of viewing the 'artist as ethnographer.'⁷³¹ As a model, it reinstituted the dialectic of inside/outside and allows the institution at the centre – in this case that of ceramics – to appear self-reflexive whilst leaving its core premise untouched. All of the exhibiting artists had established histories of producing site-specific work and had engaged with discursive sites that ranged from climate change to electrical engineering. Yet, framed as the avant-garde destroyers of ceramic tradition, the discourse on ceramics became the ultimate site of the work's effect.

Adamson proposed that the four artists in *Possibilities and Losses* "define[d] a moment in ceramic history."⁷³² For him, the demise of the ceramics

729 Glenn Adamson, "Outsider Artists," in *Possibilities and Losses: Transitions in Clay*, ed. Clare Twomey (Middlesbrough: Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art, 2009) n.p.

730 Ibid., n.p.

731 Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, Mass; London: MIT Press, 1996), 302-309.

732 Glenn Adamson, "Outsider Artists," n.p.

industry and the closure of ceramic-specific courses was leading ceramics to an end of sorts; a scene from which those artists emerged, offering a way forward, which mobilized, but was not constrained by, history. Moreover, that history was to become the catalyst for British ceramics' emergence onto the Biennial scene in 2009: an event that further emphasised the persistence of ceramics as a discursive site.

The contemporary ceramics biennial is not new: Vallauris, France has hosted one since 1966. However, the British Ceramics Biennial (BCB) is better aligned with those established in Icheon, Korea in 2001; Albisola, Italy, in the same year, and the Cluj International Biennial in Romania (2013). These international events are modelled on contemporary art biennials and have strong links with regional development initiatives. Like most biennials, the British Ceramic Biennial (BCB) was tied to an urban regeneration programme: Stoke-on-Trent City Council and Arts Council England fund it and there is an education and community programme supported by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation.⁷³³ Sited in the historical hub of British industrial ceramic production, it was proposed that ceramics could "reveal Stoke-on-Trent to the world, as well as revealing the world back to the city."⁷³⁴ It therefore conformed to broader political rhetoric that linked the arts to regeneration, as outlined in chapter two.

As Kwon has proposed, in site-specific art, values such as originality and singularity can shift from the artwork to the site.⁷³⁵ The Biennial capitalized upon this, using the event as a means of creating distinction for the city, increasing tourism, and strengthening the city's brand, which in turn authenticated – and raised the symbolic value of – ceramics produced there.

⁷³³ British Ceramics Biennial, "Supporters," British Ceramics Biennial, accessed August 13, 2015, <http://britishceramicsbiennial.com/our-supporters>.

⁷³⁴ Jeremy Theophilus and Barney Hare Duke, "Welcome to the First BCB Festival," British Ceramics Biennial, accessed August 7, 2013, <http://www.britishceramicsbiennial.com/stories/959-welcome>.

⁷³⁵ Miwon Kwon, "One Place after Another: Notes on Site Specificity," *October* 80 (Spring/Summer, 1997): 104.

This strategy can also result in financial benefits, as the numerous corporate sponsors are clearly aware. Indeed, in the 2011 festival guide the organisers Barney Hare Duke and Jeremy Theophilus used this to promote the initiative, noting that the inaugural Biennial attracted “£2 million economically, £750,000 value of media coverage, 35,000 visits and an increase in visitor’s positive perceptions of the city.”⁷³⁶ This was a statement that echoed the rhetoric of their funders, with the City Council’s corporate plans for the period when the first biennial was realized stressing “the strengths of [the city’s] past, the skills of its people and the real potential of the place” and the Arts Council’s Plan for 2011-15 arguing that “Arts and culture are part of a broader creative economy and they make an important contribution to economic growth and cultural tourism.”⁷³⁷

Engendering a shift from showing and collecting to producing, programming and experimentation, biennials are the format par excellence of the curatorial approach that has been labelled ‘New Institutionalism.’⁷³⁸ Like the artist spaces that they draw upon and seek to supersede, the studio, laboratory and factory are their preferred models. However, the BCB includes two survey exhibitions, which employ divergent curatorial approaches to cater to the demands of different types of work. The first of these – *Fresh* – features work made by students from secondary school to postgraduate level. It was shown at the Emma Bridgewater pottery works in 2009 and moved to the former Spode China Works for the second and third Biennials in 2011 and 2013, where it was exhibited alongside batch production, industrial production and large-scale and experimental work. Locating these works, which included transient pieces, such as Caroline Tattershall’s defrosting raw clay work *Award and Explore* (2011) and Cummings’ wet clay installation *After the Death of the Bear* (2013), in production

⁷³⁶ Jeremy Theophilus and Barney Hare Duke, *British Ceramics Biennial 2011* (Stoke-on-Trent: British Ceramics Biennial, 2011), 3.

⁷³⁷ Arts Council England, *The Arts Council Plan 2011-2015* (London: Arts Council England, 2011), accessed August 7, 2013, http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/uploads/pdf/Arts_Council_Plan_2011-15.pdf.

⁷³⁸ Alex Farquharson, “I Curate, You Curate, We Curate,” *Art Monthly*, no. 269 (2003): 7-10.

sites, the organisers marked those sites as the Biennial's premier outlets: places of action and events, where one must be, or miss out. This idea was reinforced by the exhibition at the Spode Works in 2011 that centred on SundayMorning@EKWC - a Netherlands-based organization that operates on the laboratory model and which places an emphasis on open-ended research.

By contrast, the *Award* exhibition, which was displayed at The Potteries Museum and Art Gallery in 2009, 2011 and 2013, might be seen to represent the ceramics establishment. The selectors are drawn from the Biennial team, the ceramics industry or are established curators from institutions with prestigious ceramics collections. Described as a "major survey exhibition of current ceramic practice in the UK" it is also largely comprised of high-profile ceramists who feature in ceramics and crafts magazines and exhibitions on a regular basis.⁷³⁹

The design of the 2009 *Award* show caused critical consternation. The exhibits were displayed without wall panels or labels and reviewer Michael C Stewart complained that this left some works 'almost unintelligible.'⁷⁴⁰ He further reported that objects from different categories: industry, batch production, ceramics for the built environment and 'one-off pieces' were displayed together in one space, resulting in confusion. These observations highlighted the way in which those categories structure the readings of the work and the difficulty of discerning between works without them. As discussed in relation to *Out of Clay*, this might have been welcomed as a true representation of the pluralism of clay as medium, however, in the museum environment, surrounded by neatly categorised and labelled displays, it created unease.

The 2011 and 2013 *Award* shows were approached in a more systematic manner. Entries were divided into three categories: Art - described as one-off ceramics, ideas, installations, Craft - studio production, and Design - ceramic

739 Jeremy Theophilus and Barney Hare Duke, *British Ceramics Biennial 2011* (Stoke-on-Trent: British Ceramics Biennial, 2011), 5.

740 Michael C. Stewart, "The First British Ceramics Biennial, 2009," *Ceramics: Art and Perception*, no. 79 (2010): 107.

design for production. Bringing together three categories that are usually opposed within ceramic discourse, the organisers ostensibly showed the broad application of ceramics. However, their attempts to define each section could not contain the bleed between the categories. For example, in the 2011 show Cummings used craft techniques to create her raw clay installation work, Rob Kessler used industrial production techniques to make the transfer printed plates that formed the basis of his installation and Katharine Morling's one-off sewing kit, made from porcelain with hand-drawn black outlines, was made in the studio. This time, although works from the different categories were still displayed together, the labels listing artist, title and medium and larger panels about the BCB itself that Stewart had demanded accompanied them. Nevertheless, it was still difficult to discern which works fell into which category.

Large and fragile works, such as Rosa Nguyen's *Living Wall* and Caroline Tattershall's *Key House* were relocated to the Spode site due to health and safety regulations at the Potteries Museum and Art Gallery in 2011. Furthermore, only *Fragment*, a small section of *Award* winner Cummings' temporary raw clay work *A Place Half Remembered* could be shown at the museum, inside a glass dome. This separation set up a false dichotomy between the static case-bound objects at the museum and the work at the factory, which also included performances by Cushway and Phillip Lee. As Claire Bishop has warned in her discussions of installation art, which draw on Umberto Eco's *Open Work* (1962), privileging art that requires engagement can perpetuate the notion that the meanings of participatory works are more open than those of objects. This is a presumption that mistakes open form for openness to interpretation, to the detriment of other forms of practice.⁷⁴¹ It is notable therefore that the Biennial team have chosen to hold the 2015 *Award* exhibition at Spode along with the

741 Claire Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History* (London: Tate Publishing, 2005); Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, trans. Anna Cancogni (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989). Original published 1962.

other key shows, eroding the site-based distinction between different forms of practice.⁷⁴²

Unlike discrete exhibitions the BCB operates across multiple sites and can, therefore, explore ceramic practice from different perspectives. In doing so, it can replicate the hierarchical structures and striations of the integrative practice of ceramics: the avant-garde and the establishment, art, craft and design, leaving them, and the continued use of medium as a unifying factor, unchecked. Although those who adopt art-oriented approaches to ceramics dominate this microcosm, it is Stoke-on-Trent's history of ceramic production that binds the diffuse elements together. The homogeneity it provides is context-specific. In *Possibilities and Losses* that context was aligned with the content. However, for the BCB, however, the connection was more tenuous. When this common factor of historical site is removed and the works are separated out, the pluralism of ceramic practice is glaringly apparent. The same might also be said of 'ceramics' in general. Yet, giving 'ceramics' further momentum as a discursive site, the BCB, like many of the other 'gestures of showing' in this thesis, also helps to sustain it as a category. Nevertheless, as a theme, it has limited scope.

Conclusion

As these examples have demonstrated, the CAC's ambiguous role in the 1970s provided funding and publicity for a host of 'gestures of showing,' which foregrounded works that conformed to the vague definition of the 'artist craftsman,' but which centred on innovative practice that was distinct from the Leach model. However, by the 1980s, the conflicts between different forms of practice had led to rifts, which challenged attempts to group – and, crucially, fund – them on the basis of medium-specificity. These tensions were manifested

742 British Ceramics Biennial, "Award," British Ceramics Biennial, accessed August 29, 2015, www.britishceramicsbiennial.com.

in Dormer's attempt to establish a new, seemingly authentic, tradition for decorative ceramics in *Fast Forward*. At the same time, the increasing deployment of clay by fine artists posed an external challenge to ceramics' use of medium-specificity as a means of definition. Britton and Margetts included sculptors' work in clay in *The Raw and the Cooked*, but they did so in order to elevate the status of ceramic practice. Despite this, their struggle to sort the works into categories whilst using shared engagement with clay as a means of coherence transmitted mixed messages.

As ceramic practice diversified it became difficult for one particular purview to dominate. Several exhibitions aimed to navigate this terrain, foregrounding histories of marginalised strands of practice. *Out of Clay* had done so by attempting to address the broad application of clay across the arts. However, in *A Secret History of Clay*, however, these precedents were largely from the world of fine art and provided a lineage for artists seeking to reconcile their medium-specific training with their fine-art-oriented work.

By the time *Possibilities and Losses* was produced in 2009, numerous ceramists, including those in the exhibition, had taken ceramics itself as their subject as well as their medium. This self-interrogation might be regarded as a consequence and the demand for 'significance' within the research departments that those such as Twomey, Brownsword, Harrison and Adamson work. Whilst ongoing changes to the academic system may lead to a more multi-disciplinary approach to the clay medium in the future, the designation 'ceramics' has continued importance for many practitioners today, as manifested in the popularity of other thematic initiatives such as the BCB.

Conspicuously, the exhibitions that are addressed above which were led by artists and critics with a significant investment in ceramics as a distinct area of artistic practice were all held in white cube art galleries. The ultimate agents of consecration for Modern art, such spaces are, as John C. Welchman has

observed, “flooded with the conditions of semantic minimization.”⁷⁴³ They, thus make ideal platforms for those who wish to silence the dialogic potential of ceramic objects and extract them from the contexts that frame them as ‘crafts.’ However, the limited press coverage that the exhibitions discussed above received and their location - largely in regional venues - highlights the disparity between the role that they have played within ceramic discourse and their wider critical impact. It also suggests that these acts of exposition too have been returned to ‘ceramics’ as a discursive site.

Pollock has postulated that in today’s shifting, corporate, global, electronic culture we must strive to deconstruct the dominant modes of framing within the museum in order to construct new ones.⁷⁴⁴ However, as the exhibitions discussed in this chapter demonstrate, whilst temporary exhibitions can expand the scope of medium-specific discourse the alternative frames they impose can be equally restrictive. Whilst only time will tell if the Adamson’s ‘moment in history’ will lead to the explosion or reconstitution of ‘ceramics,’ the examples addressed above evidence continued tension between the dialogic capacity of ceramic works and protectionist rhetoric.

⁷⁴³ John C. Welchman, “Parametrology: From the White Cube to the Rainbow Net,” in *Art after Appropriation: Essays on Art in the 1990s* (London: Routledge, 2003), 224.

⁷⁴⁴ Griselda Pollock, “Unframing the Modern: Critical Space/Public Possibility,” in *Museums After Modernism: Strategies of Engagement*, eds. Griselda Pollock and J Zemans (Malden; Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2007), 2.

Conclusion

Proceeding from my first research question, in which I asked how the dialogue between art-oriented ceramic practice and museum practice has shaped the discourse around ceramics since 1970, I have outlined numerous situations in which it could explicitly or incidentally impact on understandings of 'ceramics.' In many cases, the 'gestures of showing' I examined constituted, rather than contributed to ceramic discourse, challenging De Waal's contention that ceramists had been historically silent. Making an original contribution to knowledge, my findings offer new insights into the identity of ceramics as an area of artistic practice and the relationship between ceramic practice and the museum.

This analysis highlighted three recurrent and interrelated issues that straddled the themes addressed in each chapter: institutionalisation, the use of ceramics to talk about ceramics, and authorship. At the outset, I proposed that ceramic practice had become increasingly institutionalised since the 1970s. However, my research findings suggest that whilst the Crafts Advisory Committee provided a support network, which encouraged ceramists to align their work with the crafts for funding purposes, it too was torn between its desire to support innovative practice (which was often interdisciplinary) and the need to distinguish 'the artist craftsman' from 'the artist' for funding purposes. Consequently, ceramic practice was annexed to 'the crafts' on the basis of its link to studio pottery at the very moment when artists were beginning to explore its application within different artistic frameworks, particularly that of sculpture.

Whilst fine art-oriented work demanded different assessment criteria to studio pottery, the two were grouped on the grounds of shared process. The conflict between the artistic aspirations of ceramists who worked in this vein and the emphases of the institutions that provided platforms for their work was evidenced in the mixed messages conveyed by a number of CAC-backed

projects in the 1970s and early '80s. These included Astbury's *Trash Monument* (1974), *State of Clay* (1978), *Craft Into Art Goes* (1978) and *The Maker's Eye* (1981).

Museums – particularly the V&A, which had a commitment to supporting ceramics, but left the collecting of contemporary art to institutions such as the Tate – may also have been challenged by the rise of art-oriented ceramics. However, there was a discernable distance between museum practice and ceramic practice in the late 1970s and 1980s. Craft-centred organisations, although now more involved with museums, took the lead in organising exhibitions or, as with the CAC-supported craft shop at the V&A, highlighted works or makers that were deemed worthy of critical attention. Following the lead set by these organisations, museums incorporated art-oriented works that were produced by ceramists into their ceramics collections. A work's position as 'ceramics' or 'crafts' was, thus, tied to the context in which makers located themselves as much as the work itself: a fact highlighted by the critical reception of *Clay Sculpture* (1980).

Perhaps in response to this uncertainty about the ownership of materials that were traditionally associated with 'the crafts,' 'gestures of showing' during the 1980s and '90s were inflected by the inward turn that Britton identified in her *Maker's Eye* essay (1981). For example, *Fast Forward: New Directions in British Ceramics* (1985) sought to elevate the status of decorative pottery above that of Leach-inspired Anglo-Oriental studio pottery, but separated it from the use of ceramics within other artistic frameworks. The embrace of the plinth and the white cube gallery space in this period also served to present ceramic works as self-referential art objects. Discouraging questions about the impact that display context had on the reading of ceramic works, those employing such display techniques simultaneously exploited the Modernist aesthetic of neutrality to precisely that end.

Despite this, as Dormer noted in his the second edition of *New Ceramics* (1994), students continued to use their ceramic training to produce works that

aspired to the status of art, rather than 'pottery as art.'⁷⁴⁵ Furthermore, such work was still being shown in medium-centred shows, albeit ones like *The Raw and the Cooked* (1993), which incorporated non-ceramists' work. It was also predominantly circulated through craft and medium-centred publications. Consequently, whilst efforts to separate art-oriented works according to their intended reception (as 'art' or 'pottery as art'), rather than production, highlighted the fact that they demanded different forms of appraisal, their circulation as 'ceramics' perpetuated the idea that it was an objective category and naturalised its use as a descriptor.

Despite these efforts to foster 'pure,' aesthetic contemplation, contemporaneous acts of exposition, such as *Palaces of Culture* (1987), *Vessel* (1987) and *Out of Clay* (1988) demonstrated that ceramics was an integrative practice and ceramic materials, processes and objects had multiple applications: something the growth of works that took the 'museum as medium' from the late 1990s would further highlight. Whilst the work was naturalised as 'ceramics' when presented in institutions such as the CAC and commercial galleries, these museum-centred projects were multimedial and capitalised on the dialogic capacity of ceramic objects.

Works such as Stockmans' installations and De Waal's cargoes, which imposed a frame on ceramic vessels, might be regarded as a response to these threats to their autonomy: a means of presenting vessels as art and defending them from recontextualisation. These works were also produced at a point when resurgent interest in the role that craft plays in art, as manifested in the artworks of those in *New Labour* (2001) and Adamson's writing in *Thinking Through Craft* (2007), in particular, had begun to challenge the notion that ceramic practice should necessarily be judged as part of 'the crafts.' In this context, De Waal's *Modern Home* and *Arcanum*, particularly when read in tandem with *20th Century Ceramics* and *A Secret History of Clay*, represent a

⁷⁴⁵ Peter Dormer, *The New Ceramics: Trends and Traditions*, 2nd revised edition.

concerted effort to establish alternative medium-specific histories for ceramics when the flawed logic of its collective identity had been exposed.

De Waal's works lead us to the second recurrent issue – the prevalence of ceramic works that are 'about' ceramics or craft. This might be considered symptomatic of the position of ceramic practice within art colleges since the 1970s, where students received training in ceramic skill, unshored from the critical framework provided by pottery. In contrast to fine art courses, which were beginning to promote a more ad-hoc approach to materials, such courses placed the language of ceramics first. Students were encouraged to consider how they could approach a problem or subject through ceramics, rather than thinking about what they wanted to achieve and considering whether or not ceramics was appropriate. Yet, the relationship between practice and theory was gaining greater emphasis within such programmes, encouraging them to consider the impact that context had on the reading of their work. Many of the works and ideas addressed in this thesis, from Britton's concept of 'double presence' to De Waal's *Arcanum* and Twomey's *Made in China*, manifest this concern. As detailed in relation to the latter, at present, the rise of immaterial labour has given the historical association of ceramics with manual production heightened conceptual import. However, like the interest in making vessels about vessels in the 1980s, this theme has a finite critical lifespan.

In spite of the limitations such introspection, it has been accelerated by the emphasis on originality and impact in academia – something that is easier to argue for within a small would-be field than broader artistic contexts. The resultant self-reflexive explorations might be regarded as a means of working through the condition of being 'ceramic.' However, although they form a fertile partnership with museums' considerations of the limitations of their own interpretative techniques, seeking originality within existing boundaries, they risk creating a sense of continuity between historic and contemporary ceramic practice that masks the substantial differences between object making and installation art. In addition to this, many of the interventions commissioned as a

result are temporary, allowing museums to accommodate contemporary practice that moves beyond the object without reforming their permanent collections displays. They can create the impression that museums and 'ceramics' are progressive, whilst resisting reform at the core. Nevertheless, if, as Bal has argued, these 'gestures of showing' are arguments, they are arguments in which museums' focus on 'audiences' and interpretation collide with the statements made by the artist, creating space for reconsideration.

Authorship lies at the heart of this issue and many of the others that are outlined in this thesis. In each chapter ceramic and museum practice can be seen to move towards the devolution of meaning from the authority figure – whether artist, curator or academic – to audience. This is concurrent with, and, perhaps, reflects, the growing emphasis on public accountability and the rhetoric of impact within arts and education policies. For ceramics practitioners, this shift has challenged the notion that the meaning is embodied in the object.

Foregrounding the role that context plays in the reading of a work, openly discursive works hold the potential to demonstrate that the categorisation 'ceramics' when used to define a category of art, has always been contingent. For example, the curators of *Clay Sculpture* used it to argue that the works it included could be read as sculpture, by highlighting their formal sculptural values and exhibiting them in a sculpture park. However, although the exhibition was designed to heighten the visitors' awareness of the relationship between work and site, Hepburn (an artist who had institutional ties to 'ceramics') curated it and it only included works by those with ceramic training. Used as a platform for debate about the relationship between ceramic practice and sculpture, this further recontextualisation returned the focus to the discourse on ceramics rather than 'sculpture.'

In the 1980s, awareness of the impact that framing can have on reception led a number of the practitioners who intended for their work to be viewed as art, including Peacock and Poncelet, to quit ceramics as medium, as well as crafts and ceramics contexts. Yet, as the career trajectories of Lord and

Kneebone demonstrate, using a single medium is not necessarily a bar to acceptance as art. Indeed, the analysis of Twomey's work in chapter five, which draws on Kwon's discussions of site-specificity, indicates that just as the multimedial works produced by ceramists have been claimed for 'ceramics' by various publications, the repetition of site-specific works as part an artist's exhibition history can align them with their vitae and return their work to 'ceramics' as a discursive site.

Many of the medium-specific exhibitions addressed in chapter six perform similar acts of recuperation, incorporating works that might freely operate in contexts outside the confines of 'ceramics' and returning the focus to the material they are made from and their makers' biographies. However, whilst they attempted to make different statements about ceramic works, the real gap they highlighted was not between the works and the specific statements made about them, but between the different applications of ceramic practice. *Possibilities and Losses* (2009) and the British Ceramics Biennial (BCB)(2009-present) and works discussed elsewhere in this thesis, such as *Arcanum* (2005), which, again, addressed ceramics as a discursive site, rather than an artistic category, might thus be seen to reflect its true form. Yet, re-making, rather than deconstructing ceramics, they also gave the institutions that consecrate 'ceramics' a continued relevance.

Despite these acts of reconstitution, projects such as Twomey's *Trophy* highlighted the fact that 'ceramics' is a construct by demonstrating that all objects can be read in relation to other discursive sites. Although the work has been claimed for ceramics and also by the museum, the stories she received about the new lives of the individual birds that were taken from the museum's galleries reflected the recontextualising power of personal engagement. Whilst Twomey's work made this explicit, as Eglin's *Madonnas* and the works in *The Uncanny Room* (2002) demonstrated, discrete objects can be reframed through visitors' interpretations as readily as works that demand the visitors' active participation.

As Rancière has proposed:

Being a spectator is not some passive condition that we should transform into activity. It is our normal situation. We also learn and teach, act and know as spectators who all the time link what we see to what we have seen and said, done and dreamed. There is no more a privileged form than there is a privileged starting point.⁷⁴⁶

Returning to my initial question about the gap between ceramic works and the statements made about 'ceramics,' instead of discovering what the agencies of consecration that frame and value 'ceramics' consecrate, I observed efforts to make and re-make that category, some of which gained heightened importance at certain points, but which were never truly successful in showing the logic of assessing diverse applications of ceramic practice together. Rather than fixing and shifting the discourse around ceramics, my findings, thus, indicate that gestures of showing have been a crucial means of establishing and sustaining ceramics as a discursive site. However, as ceramic practitioners have engaged with other functional and discursive sites, they have highlighted the limitations of this medium-specific standpoint. Considered not as a given, but as one of many contexts within which ceramics practitioners might 'show' being of the category 'ceramics,' can be approached as a choice. Furthermore, so too can being 'art.' With no guarantee of success in either category, this research suggests that ceramics practitioners should ask 'why ceramics?' and 'why *just* ceramics?' and locate their work accordingly.

Challenging the notion that the production, dissemination and reception of ceramic practice should be co-dependent, this research might be seen as an attack on those who choose ceramics as their sole medium. Yet, it simply contends that ceramics is an integrative practice, within which practitioners might share their experience and medium-based expertise, but which need not define the resultant objects and artworks. Viewed as a staging area through which different issues can be addressed, or the skills required to produce a

⁷⁴⁶ Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London and New York: Verso, 2011), 17.

particular object acquired, ceramics can accommodate different levels of engagement: master craftsmen and industrial workers, 'visitors' and specialists, artists, potters, designers and those who embrace the fluid identity of the contemporary creative. Likewise, their works can be used in the home, displayed in museums and the various departments within them, shown in craft exhibitions, installed in historic houses.

Offering a different lens through which to address ceramic practice, this contribution to the literature on the artist-museum relationship might encourage artists and curators to reassess the impact that the uncritical use of the classification 'ceramics' may have on the reading of an artist's work. However, to accept this would entail a consideration of the role that those whose institutional or creative identities centre on the distinctiveness of 'ceramics' as a category have played in masking its pluralism. It would also demand the willingness to re-think long-established modes of organisation.

Adamson's deconstruction of 'the crafts' and related shifts in practice may have prompted a reconsideration of the validity of existing modes of categorisation.⁷⁴⁷ Yet, those with a vested interest in distinguishing 'ceramics' from other areas of artistic practice have proven adept at reconfiguring it in the face of change. Whilst ceramics courses in Britain have continued to close, 2009 saw the launch of the BCB; 2011 brought the major AHRC-funded project *Ceramics in the Expanded Field: Behind the Scenes at the Museum* at the University of Westminster, of which this thesis forms a part; in 2012 Cardiff School of Art held a conference with the explicitly separatist title *Ceramics and Sculpture: Different Disciplines and Shared Concerns*; and the University of Sunderland has held numerous seminars on the relationships between ceramics, industry and the museum. The discourse around ceramics has also been perpetuated through publications including *Ceramic Review*, *Ceramics: Art and Perception* and the online journals *Interpreting Ceramics* and *C-File* as well as international exhibitions. Moreover, Jo Dahn has just launched a book that celebrates *New*

⁷⁴⁷ Glenn Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft*.

Directions in Ceramics (2015) and which asks “What non-traditional activities does the term ‘ceramics’ now encompass?”⁷⁴⁸

As the connection between ceramics and crafts is being eroded, ‘ceramic art’ may be rising to replace it. For example, 2015 saw *Ceramic Review* change its tagline from ‘The Magazine of Ceramic Art and Craft’ to ‘The International Magazine of Contemporary and Historical Ceramic Art’ and York Museum and Art Gallery launched its Centre of Ceramic Art (COCA). Yet, both retained a link to the historical and continued to display a broad range of works, including everything from domestic wares and art-oriented studio pottery to installation art.⁷⁴⁹ York Museums Trust also commissioned Twomey to produce an installation for the launch of COCA, but the resultant work – *Manifest* – threw a spotlight on the gallery’s title. Much of the gallery’s content might be addressed under the category of ‘pottery as an art form.’ However, although Twomey’s was comprised of ten thousand ceramic bowls and was about ceramic production, outside of the discursive framework of ceramics, it might simply be viewed as art. All of these developments indicate the continued discursive construction of ‘ceramics’ as an artistic category.

Whilst I hope that this research might impel ceramists to consider the fit between the statements they wish to make and the contexts in which they locate themselves, I suspect that, faced with shifts in art and design practice, the term ‘ceramics’ will continue to be added as a qualifier and ceramists’ works will continue to be consecrated by the same institutions. In some cases, this will mask ceramists’ potential contribution to wider artistic discourse, whilst others will simply use ceramics to copy established forms of artistic practice without fear of comparison “gimpily tag[ging] along in an increasingly breathless effort not

⁷⁴⁸ Jo Dahn, *New Directions in Ceramics: From Spectacle to Trace* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015); Bloomsbury, “About New Directions in Ceramics,” Bloomsbury Publishing, accessed August 30, 2015, <http://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/new-directions-in-ceramics-9781472526717>.

⁷⁴⁹ The 10,000 bowls in Twomey’s *Manifest* represent the 10,000 hours it is said to take to acquire a craft skill, but they were actually slip cast in small quantities, using a supplied mould, by a large number of people who were frequently novices in the technique. They thus brought craft values, within which mastery and singularity is held in high esteem into collision with both mass production and the broader social and psychological benefits of collaboration.

to be left behind as a cultural remnant.”⁷⁵⁰ Nonetheless, this research serves as a rebuttal to those who might complain about the marginalisation of ‘ceramic sculpture/installation/intervention from art discourse, as it asks them to consider their own complicity in that situation.

This thesis pertains to just a small proportion of the objects, artworks and practices that form the integrative practice of ceramics: those that have been framed as art (or *an* art) and which have been exhibited in public museums and galleries in Britain since the 1970s. It also is far from all encompassing – indeed I was compelled to omit numerous other case studies that could have fitted into each theme, each of which made a different statement. Alternative selections may have brought different issues to the foreground, yet I believe that they would further demonstrate the pluralism and dialogic potential of ceramic objects and the limitations that being solely read as ‘ceramics’ can impose on them. Whilst this research, in attending to the different artistic applications of ceramics, contains little analysis of the parallels between ceramics and other craft media, it suggests that an investigation of the discursive function of ‘gestures of showing’ that include or address their paths may prove equally fruitful. Although my research focused on public museums and galleries, in order to examine the relationship between different iterations of ceramics, particularly the relationship between historical and contemporary, a thorough investigation of the role that ‘acts of showing’ in commercial galleries have played in ceramic discourse may also provide further insight into the shifting dynamic between different aspects of the integrative practice of ceramics.

As an identifiable trope, the shift away from the object towards the ephemeral highlighted within this research might serve as a prompt for further research into the correspondence between contemporary practice and the

⁷⁵⁰ Louise Mazanti, “‘All that’s missing is a word with faith, with power’ – The Crafts Discourse in Denmark Today,” *Think Tank* (2005): 24, accessed June 13, 2013, <http://www.thinktank04.eu/image/papers>. Mazanti was describing the way in which crafts practitioners have employed sculpture, installation and other models of artistic practice because craft itself lacked a discursive centre.

demands of funders. Providing a means through which museums can 'show' their support of contemporary practice and their active engagement with audiences without changing their core acquisition and display policies, temporary site-based works have transformed ceramic practice, opening up new opportunities, but, perhaps, closing off others. Furthermore, they provide quantifiable outputs for universities in departments where costly technical facilities have been closed and more lucrative research programmes are prioritised

In addition to this, it is crucial to note that this thesis is not a history of the exhibition and display of ceramics in general. Indeed, that subject has yet to be addressed in detail and would further enrich the discourse on both ceramic practice and the museum. An analysis of how the integrative practice of ceramics has been addressed in the museum, which might stretch from tile-making and ritual statuary to scientific and industrial applications, through to fine art would provide a fascinating insight into its pluralism.

In each chapter, I have only had the space to address the relationship between ceramists' works and other forms of artistic practice in relation to the identity of 'ceramics' in Britain. Viewed outside the framework of ceramics, these works might also contribute to a host of broader national and international debates, including those on the relationship between the artist and the museum, the return to materiality in art and practice-based research. I would urge that, rather than regarding this research as an alternative history of ceramics, subsequent researchers take it as a spur to look further outwards, considering each work that incorporates ceramics on its own merits in order to explore its links with other discursive sites and the works that relate to them.

Returning to De Waal's proposal that ceramists' silence has opened up an interpretative vacuum, I caution that this notion reinforces the idea that "critic, the curator and collector," are solely responsible for its separation from broader artistic practice. Instead, this research demonstrates that the institutions and individuals that have sought to sustain the distinction of 'ceramics' as a

category of artistic practice have been complicit in their own ghettoization. Instead of speaking *for* themselves it contends that they have been speaking *amongst* themselves.

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1. Alison Britton. *The Maker's Eye*, 1981. Installation shot of curated display, Crafts Council Gallery, Waterloo Place, London, UK.



2. Philip Eglin, *Microwave Oven-safe Madonna*, 2001. Porcelain. V&A Museum, London, UK.



3. Katherine Morling, *Split-Headed Fish and Seahorse*, 2012. Earthstone clay, porcelain slip and black stain. Potteries Museum and Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent, UK.



4. Paul Astbury, *Trash Monument to Poor Craftsmanship and Poor Art*, 1974.
Mixed media. Installation shot, Crafts Advisory Committee Gallery,
Waterloo Place, London, UK. Image courtesy of the artist.



5. Paul Astbury, *Space Ship Derelict*, 1974. Press-moulded porcelain, glaze.
Crafts Council Collection, London, UK.



6. Eduardo Paolozzi, *Cyclops*, 1957. Bronze. Tate Gallery collection, London, UK.



7. Jo Stockham, *Neutral History*, 1987. Mixed media. Installation shot, Stoke-on-Trent City Museum and Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent, UK. Image courtesy of the artist.



8. Magdalena Odundo, *Acknowledged Sources*, 2002. Royal Staffordshire porcelain plates, transfer-print. Installation shot, Russell-Cotes Gallery, Bournemouth, UK.



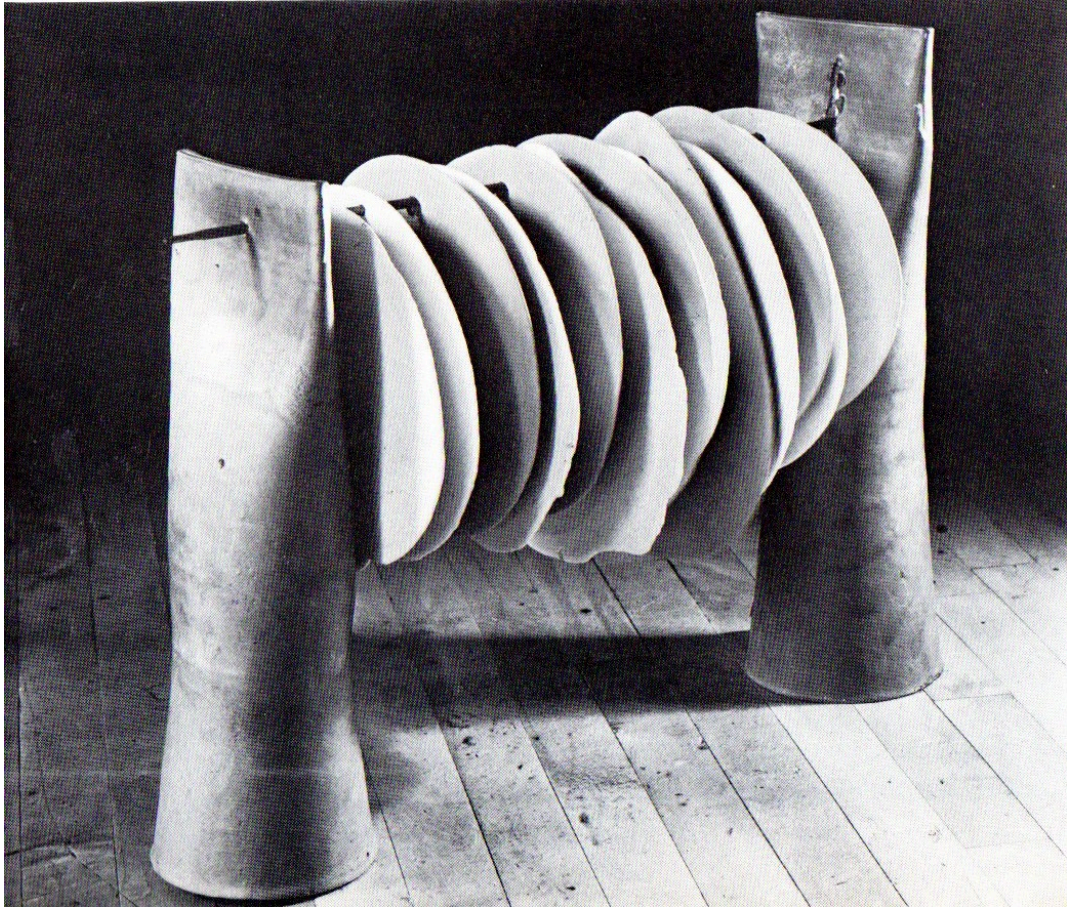
9. Edmund de Waal, *Arcanum*, 2005. Mixed media. Installation shot, National Museum of Wales, Cardiff, Wales.



10. Marcus Thomas, *A Sense of Place*, 1995. Slipcast clay. Installation shot, Aberystwyth University Ceramic Collection and Archive.



11. Grayson Perry, *Angel of the South*, 2006. Cast iron. Installation shot, The Collection, Lincoln, UK.



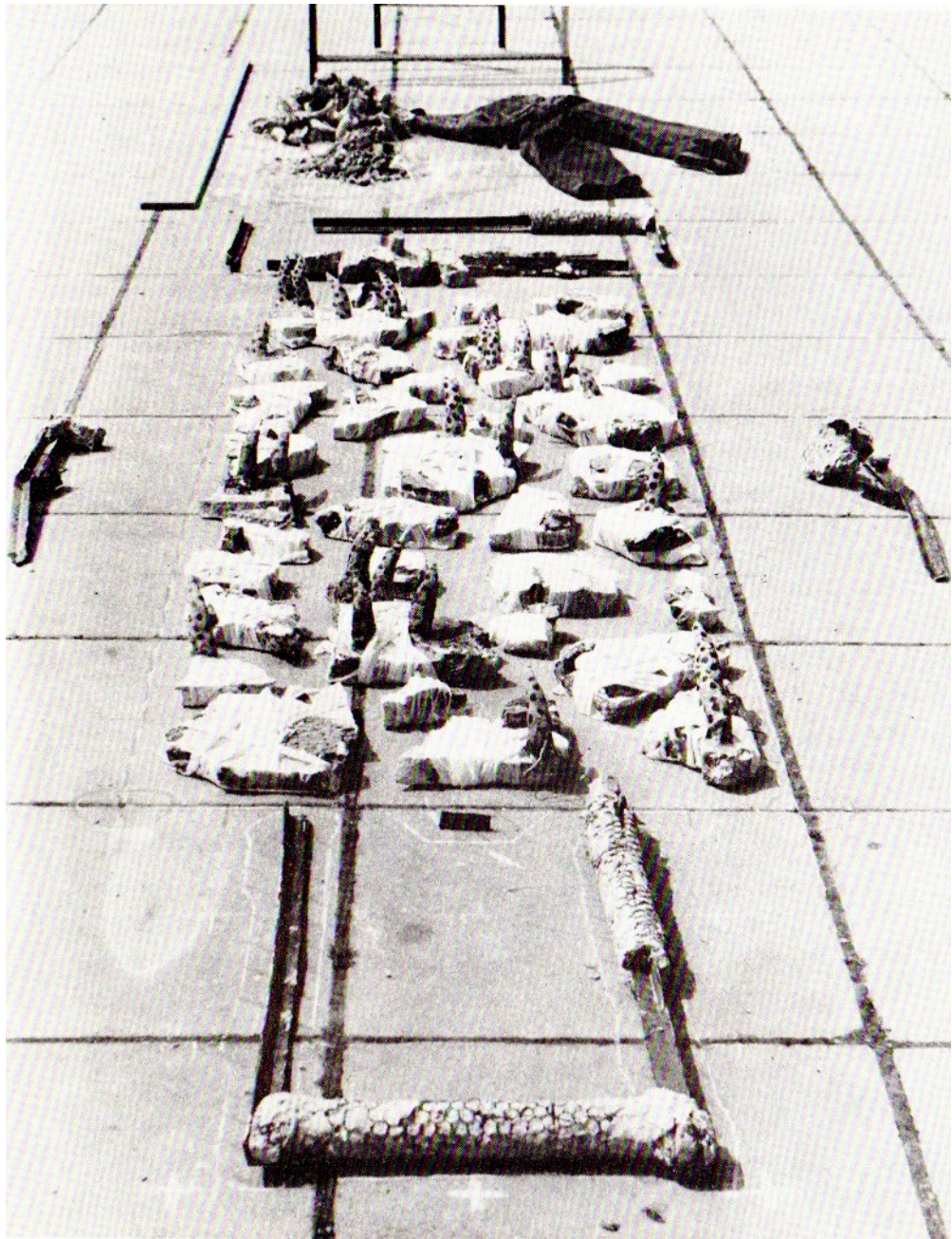
12. Tony Hepburn, *Clay and steel construction*, about 1971. Stoneware, silver lustre, steel, slip. Private collection.



13. Anthony Caro, *Month of May*, 1963. Steel, aluminium, painted magenta, orange and green. Tate Gallery collection, London, UK.



14. Richard Mackness, *Cult 1000*, 1977. Fired clay, wood, straw, cord, black oiled pigment. Bristol Polytechnic degree show, Bristol, UK. Image courtesy of the artist.



15. Percy Peacock, *Impact Imperative*, 1978. Fired clay, raw clay, found objects, paint, wax, fabric. Image courtesy of the artist.



16. Jim Robison, *Megalithic Column*, about 1980. Installation shot, Yorkshire Sculpture Park, Wakefield, UK. Image courtesy of Yorkshire Sculpture Park.



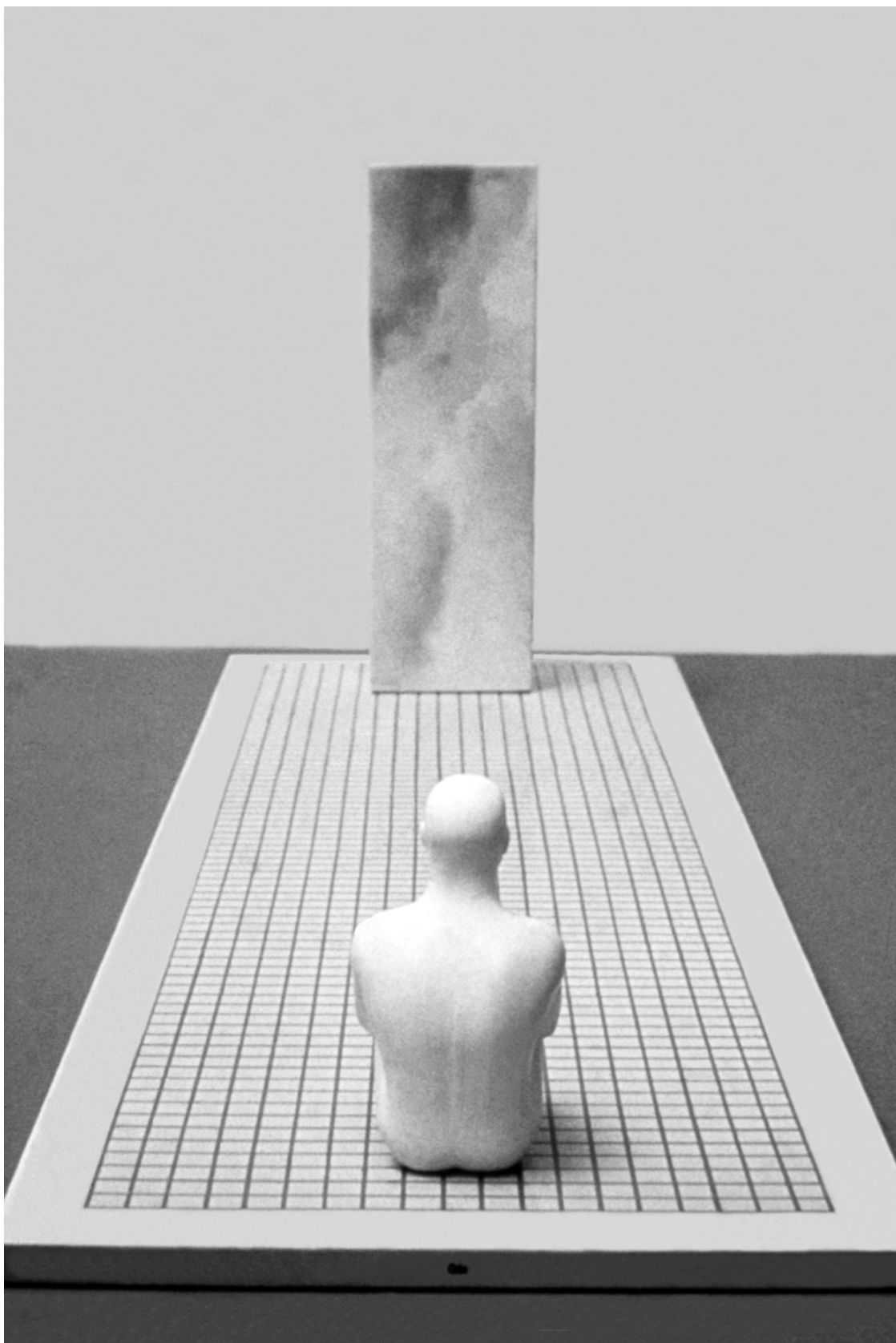
17. Paul Astbury, *Sticky, Dry, Open*, 1980. Wood, dry porcelain clay, sticky putty. Installation shot, Yorkshire Sculpture Park, Wakefield, UK. Image courtesy of the artist.



18. Paul Astbury, *Sky Tunnel*, 1980. Porcelain, sticky tape, aluminium.
Installation shot, Yorkshire Sculpture Park, Wakefield, UK. Image courtesy
of the artist.



19. Elizabeth Fritsch, *Improvisations from Earth to Air*, 1976. Reduced stoneware pots with painted slip decoration. Installation shot, British Crafts Centre, London, UK. Photograph © *Ceramic Review*.



20. Glenys Barton, *Terminal Zone I*, 1974. Bone china with silk screen transfer.



21. Glenys Barton, *Sky Plateau II*, 1976. Bone china with silk screen transfer.



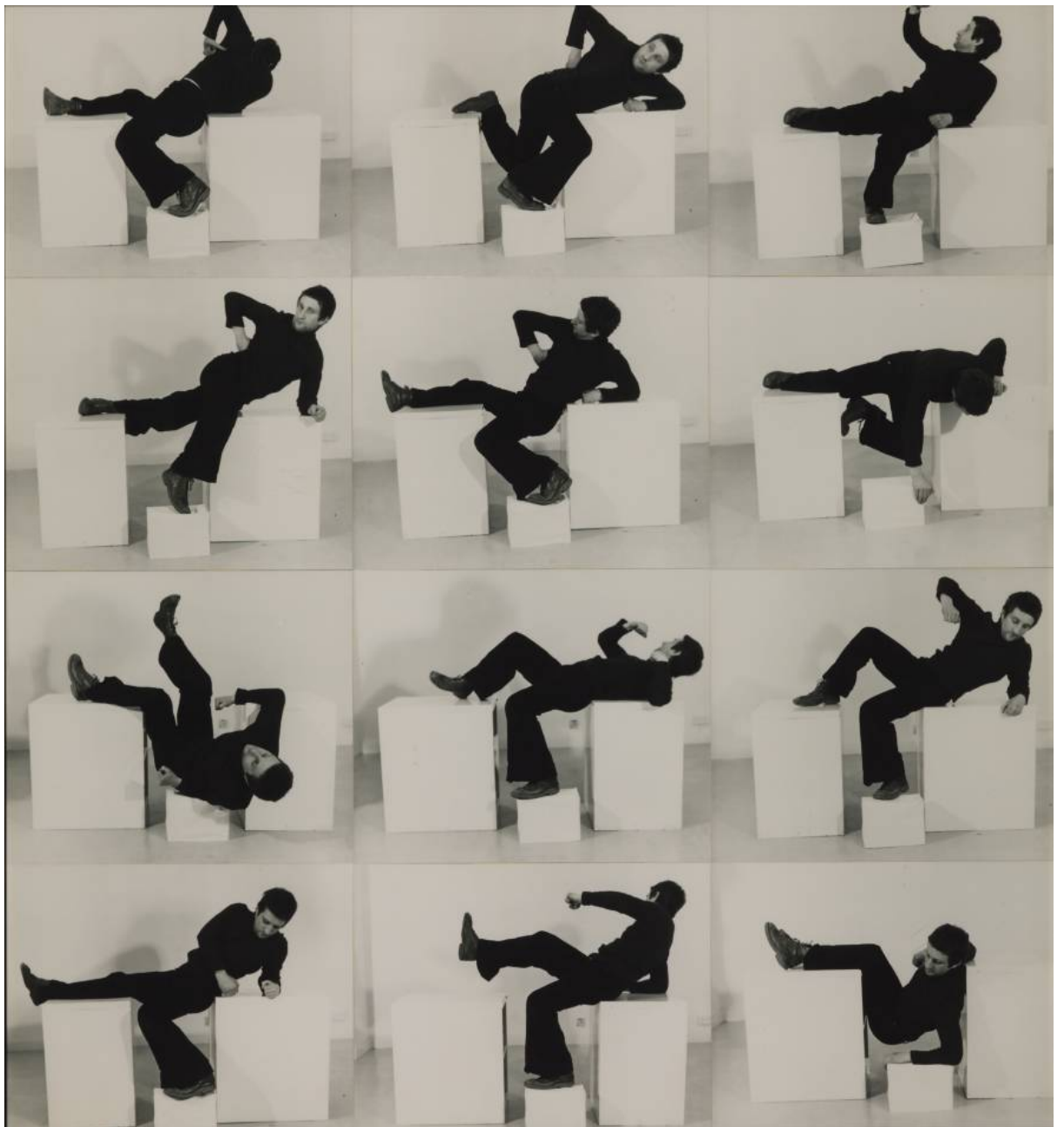
22. Craft shop at the V&A, London, UK (1974). © *Design* magazine.



23. V&A ceramics galleries 1909. Image courtesy of the V&A Museum, London, UK.



24. V&A ceramics galleries, London, UK, 1999. © *Ceramic Review*.



25. Bruce McLean, *Pose Work for Plinths I*, 1971. Black and white photograph on paper and board. Tate Gallery collection, London, UK.



26. Andrew Lord, *Round Grey Shadow*, 1978. Earthenware. Leeds Art Gallery collection, Lotherton Hall, Leeds, UK.



27. Gwyn Hanssen-Piggot, *Still Life*, 2 bottles, goblet and beaker, 1992. Wheel-thrown Limoges porcelain, glazed and wood-fired. V&A Museum, London, UK.



28. Andrew Lord, *Cubist vase and tray*, 1978. Hand-formed stoneware. V&A Museum, London, UK.



29. Edmund de Waal, *Signs & Wonders*, 2009. Porcelain and powder coated aluminium. Installation shot, V&A Museum, London, UK.



30. Cecile Johnson-Soliz, *Twenty Eight Pitchers*, 1994-96. Installation shot, National Museum Wales, Cardiff, Wales.



31. Edmund de Waal, *Modern Home*, 1999. Installation shots, High Cross House, Dartington, UK.



32. Richard Slee, *Bedroom Snake*, 2001. Glazed ceramic, installation shot from *The Uncanny Room*, Pitzhanger Manor, London, UK. Photograph by Philip Sayer.



33. Those Environmental Artists, *Living Space at Stoke*, 1991. Mixed media, installation shot. Stoke-on-Trent City Museum and Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent, UK.



34. Conrad Atkinson, *Mining Culture*, 1996. Ceramic landmines with on-glaze painting on biscuitware, installation shot. © The artist and Courtauld Institute of Art, London, UK.



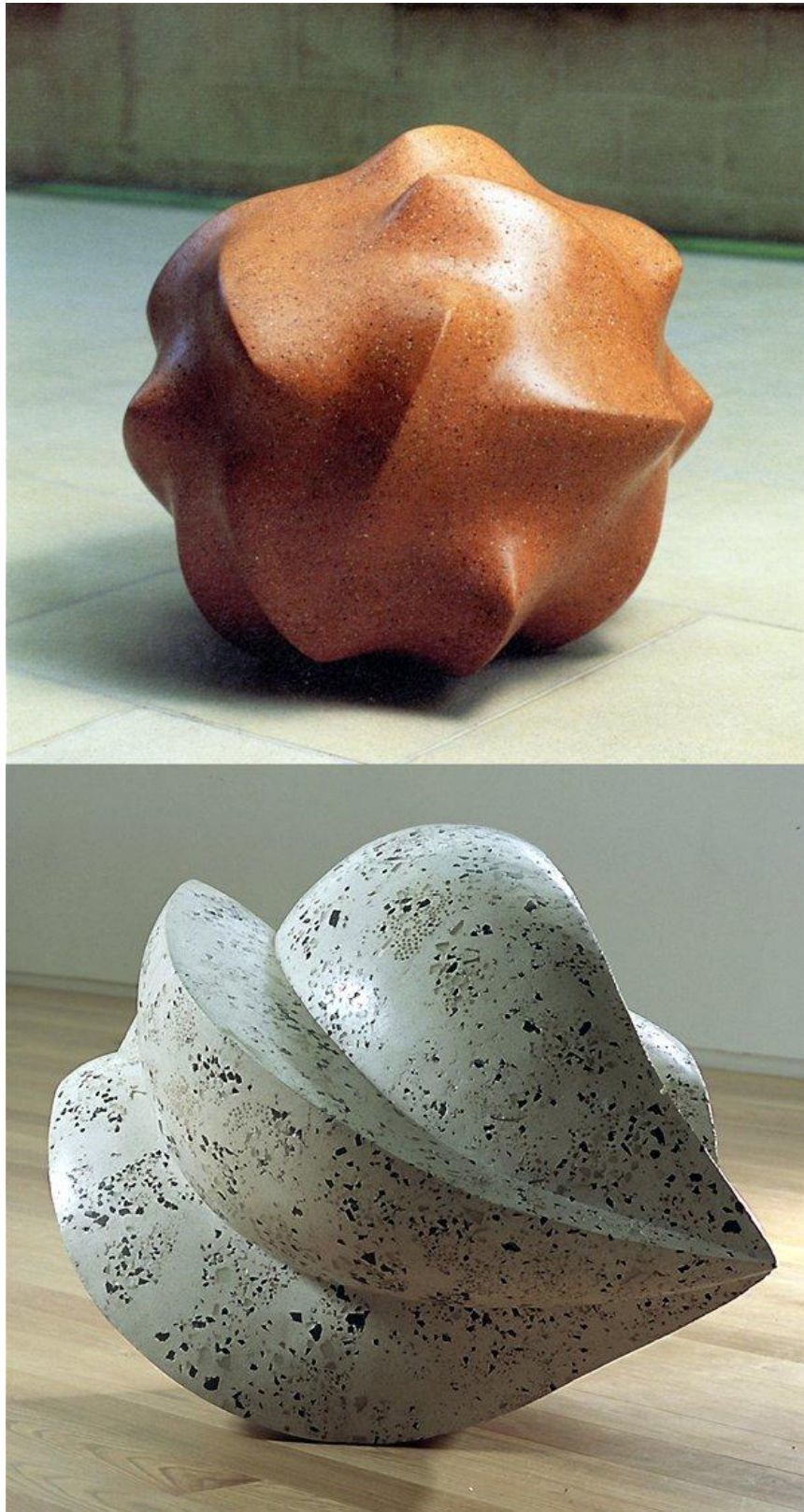
35. Clare Twomey, *Consciousness/Conscience*, 2001-present. Bone china.



36. Clare Twomey, *Trophy*, 2006. Installation shot. V&A Museum, London, UK.



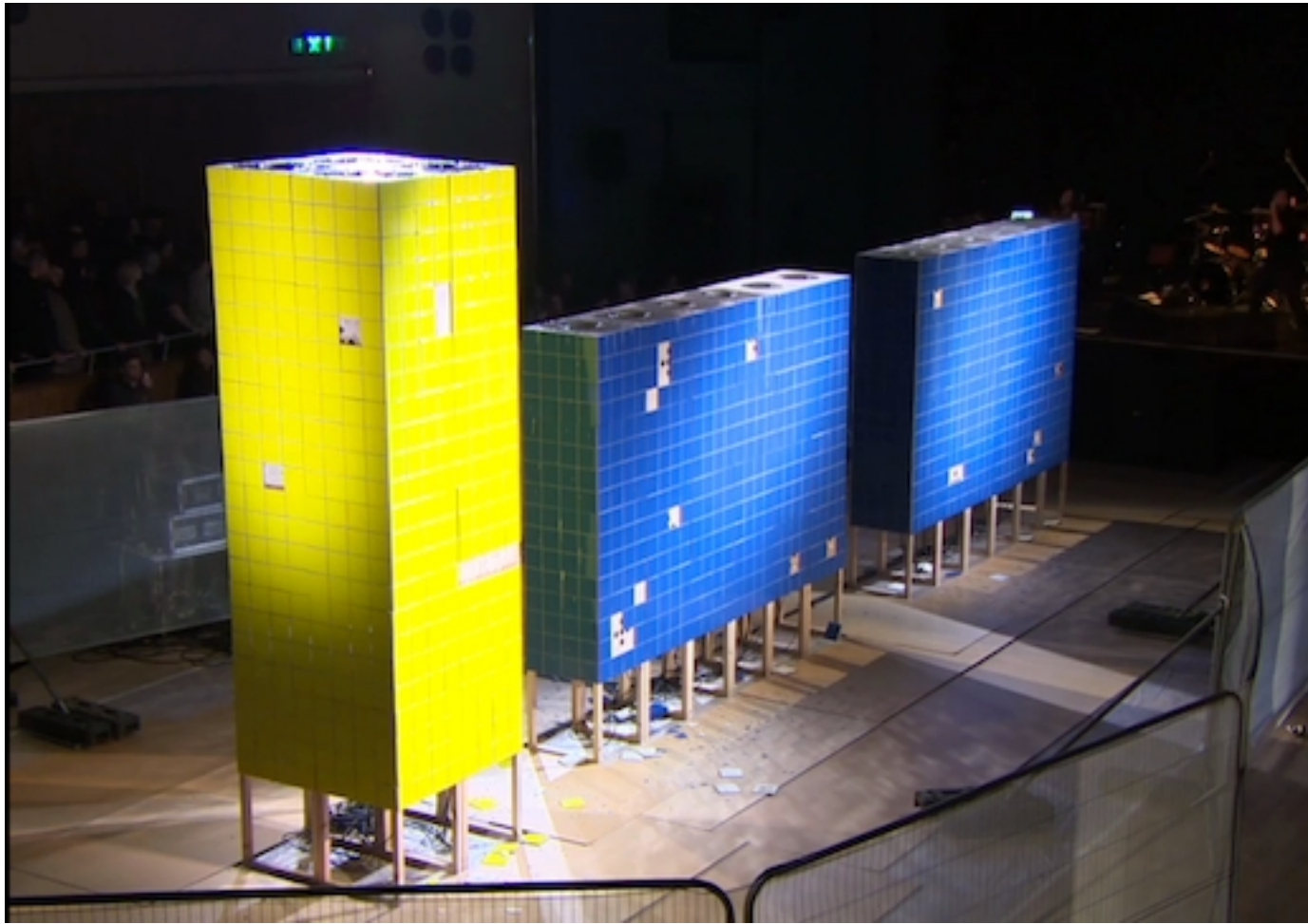
37. Clare Curneen, *Daphne* and replica hands, 2006. Partially glazed porcelain.
Gallery Oldham, Oldham, UK.



38. Felicity Aylieff, *Bittersweet* (top), 2001. Press moulded Almondsbury red brick clay; *Twist and Turn* (bottom), 1996. Press moulded white clay body with aggregates of fired coloured porcelain, fired terracotta and borosilicate and ballotini glass. Manchester Art Gallery, Manchester, UK.



39. Caroline Achaintre, Camden Arts Centre residency, 2014. Installation shot, Camden Arts Centre, London, UK.



40. Keith Harrison, *Bustleholme*, 2013. Mixed media. Installation shot, De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill-on-Sea, UK.



41. Clare Twomey, *Made in China*, 2013. Installation shot, British Ceramics Biennial, Stoke-on-Trent, UK.



42. Bouke De Vries, *Vanitas (Exploded Teapot)*, c. 1765/2012. Exploded Bow porcelain. Image courtesy of the artist.